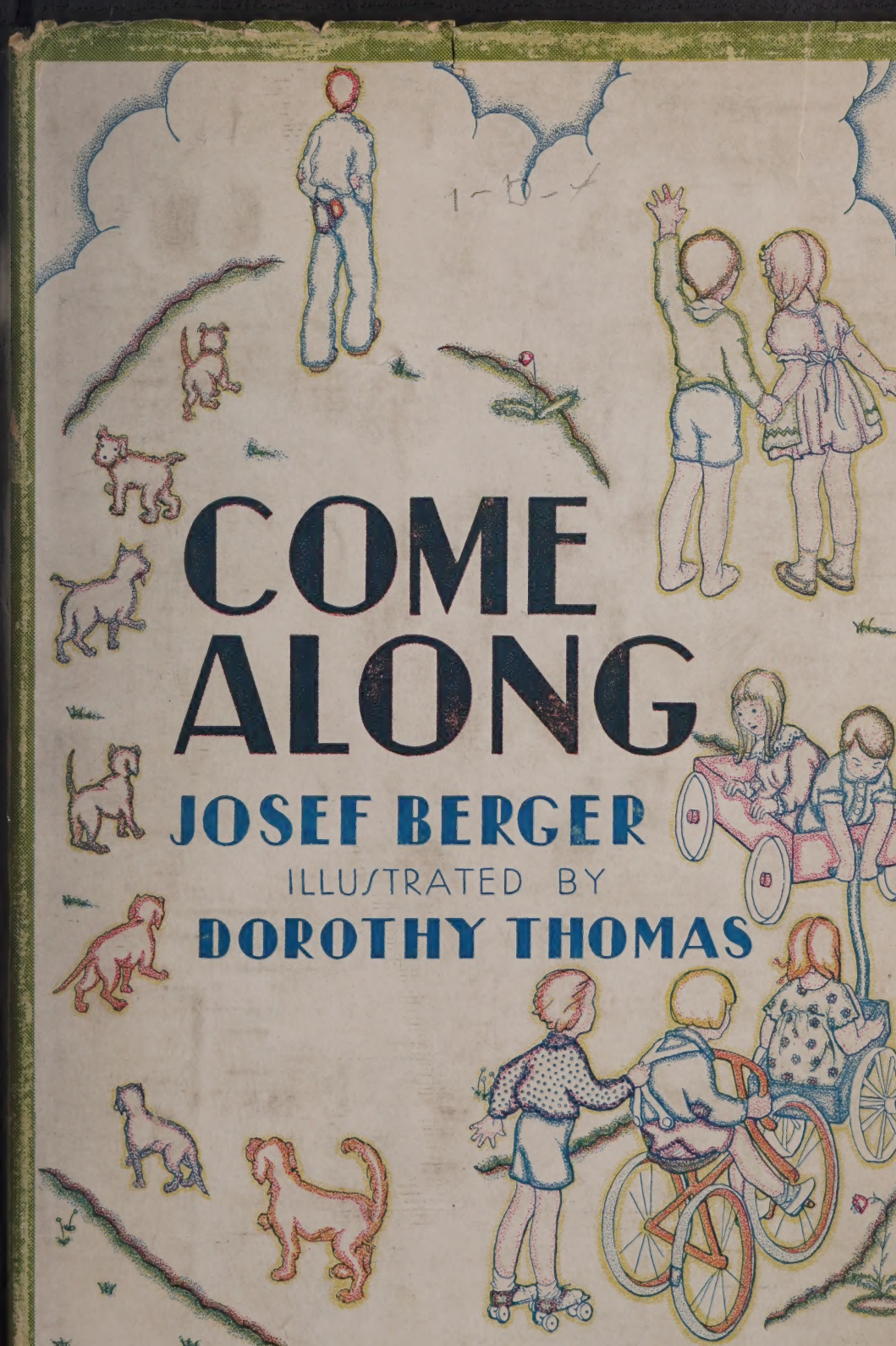
COME ALONG
JOSEF BERGER
ILLUSTRATED BY
DOROTHY THOMAS

$2.00

COME ALONG

By Josef Berger

BIG DIPPER, a busy bean farmer, learns too late that a puppy dog may be important. His two children have run away in search of one, and he tells his trouble to Come Along Smith Brown Jones, his neighbor. Come Along, who has never had a worry, gets a notion to plant dog biscuit instead of beans. When the dogs come up, the children would come back, he explains. Highly excited, he sets out in search of the children, to let them in on the big secret of the puppy dog crop. This modern imaginative story is for children from six to eight. Its style is as charming as its plot. There are about twenty illustrations, of which four are in color

COME ALONG

JOSEF BERGER

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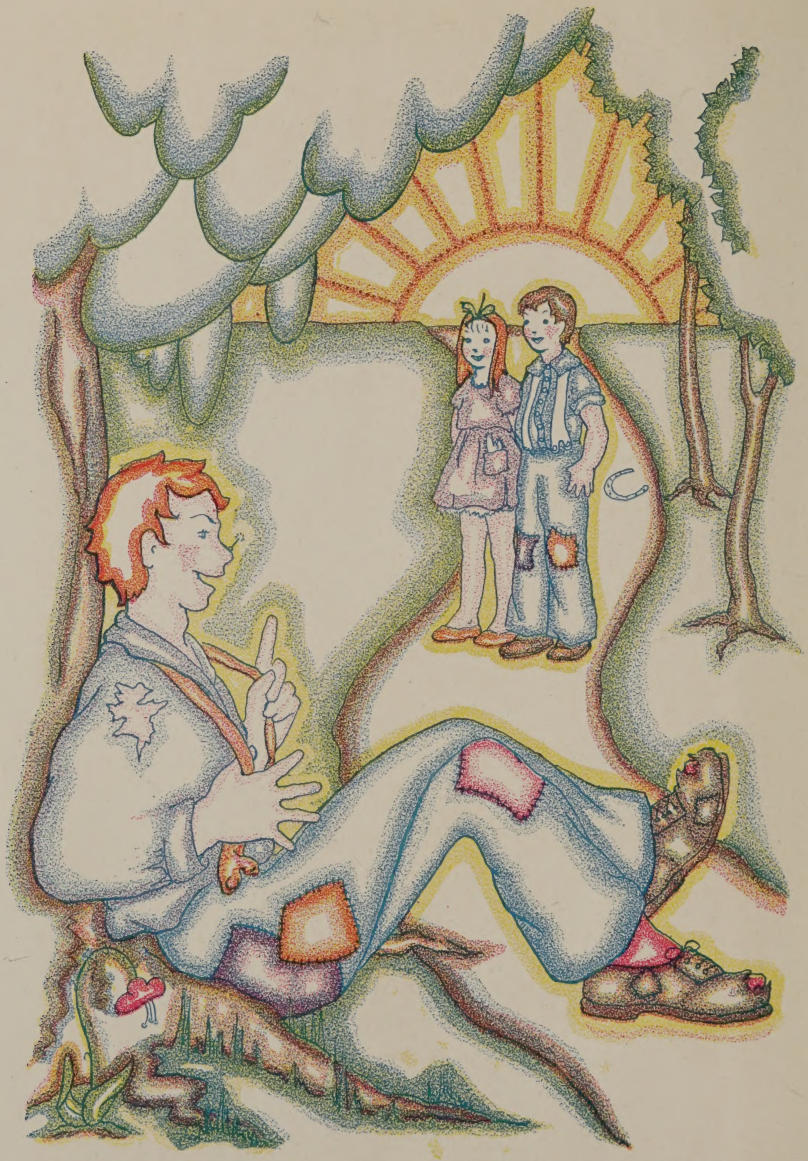

IT FLOATED DOWN UNTIL IT TOUCHED THE TIP OF HIS NOSE, AND THERE IT BALANCED ITSELF CAREFULLY (*page* 19)

COME ALONG

BY

JOSEF BERGER

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY

DOROTHY GAY THOMAS

BOSTON AND NEW YORK

HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY

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1930

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TO

OUR PARENTS

ILLUSTRATIONS

It floated down until it touched the tip of his nose, and there it balanced itself carefully *Colored frontispiece*

In front of the moon a circus parade was passing (*in color*) 34

Two people, a boy and a girl, had stepped from behind the tall sunflowers 47

'They have added their tricycles and their scooters to the end of the coaster wagons and play carts' (*in color*) 60

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COME ALONG

I

Come Along Smith Brown Jones sat on the back gate soaking up the sunshine, while the grasshoppers hopped grass and the sunflowers softly took care of their shadows.

'Nothing ails me,' he said, as he swung out and let the cool tips of the soapweeds tickle the bottoms of his feet. 'And if anything did, this would be good for it. Besides, the hinges of this gate have a friendly squeak.'

He had just finished breakfast. Come Along had his breakfast in Colorado, his dinner in Utah, supper in Arizona, and snacks and hand-outs in New Mexico. This he managed by living in a corner house. The middle of the house was smack in the corner of Colorado,

Utah, Arizona, and New Mexico, and the middle of his dinner table was smack in the middle of the house.

'I like having so many places in the house all at once,' he said when he first moved in. 'The places in this place are as good as Massachusetts, Minneapolis, Mississippi, and the Moon and Move-Over. This way I can go places for a change by just moving around the table without bothering to leave home. And a change,' said Come Along, 'is good for a person.'

When he needed a change extra, or on holidays, he shoved the sugar bowl aside and sat on the middle of the table in the middle of his house, smack on the corner *of the corner* OF THE CORNER where the four places came together, and smiled in his great joy.

'Swinging on the gate,' murmured Come Along this one morning, 'is a soft job.' He sailed out gracefully in a wide circle. 'Soaking up the sun,' he added, as he gracefully sailed back in a wide circle, 'is a great life. And watching the grasshoppers hop grass, the woodpeckers peck wood, and the gophers go for what they go for, is happy days. I got no bothers.'

Then he let his long, lank body slide off the gate, settled his head against a fence post, and swung his legs up over an old rain barrel that was lying on its side because its troubles were over long ago.

He closed his eyes against the sun and watched little

circles of yellow underneath his eyelids grow into big circles of blue, and the big circles of blue swell into bigger circles of green and lavender and warm sleepy tan.

He listened to the click of the flying grasshoppers, to the zigzag singsong of a honey-bee late for work, to a tumbleweed making up its mind to run away with the next good breeze, and sometimes he thought he was listening to the sand-lilies thinking up small wishes to come true if nobody minded.

The circles underneath his eyelids turned back to

yellow, and, as they grew brighter and brighter, a warm tingle began at his toes and danced all the way up to his forehead.

'I am close friends with the sun,' Come Along thought, 'warm friends, the sun and me. But there is such a thing as a friendship getting too close, too warm.'

Now, at his side a baby pine tree leaned over. It was just old enough to cast a small shadow, and it looked very handy to Come Along.

'That shadow is slipping this way,' Come Along slowly figured. 'Now, if I move over to sit in it, it will keep on slipping, and I'll only have to move again. (I have had experience with shadows.) If I wish very hard, that only makes it take longer. But if I sit here and wait for it, it will come along. That's the way to make friends with shadows.'

By and by the little tree's shadow did reach Come Along, but it quickly slipped past him.

'Pleasant in the shade to-day,' Come Along remarked, 'if only the shade would stick around.'

But just then another shadow, a fine large one, fell across him suddenly, and at the same time he heard a deep husky voice muttering:

'Same old farm, I reckon. But somehow, 'tain't what it useter be! Same old work to do, I reckon. But still, 'tain't what it useter be! Same old breakfast, dinner,

supper, I reckon. But one way or 'nother, 'tain't what it useter be!'

And the voice went on and on that way, a sad throaty voice like a steam roller with a cold in the chest.

II

"'Tain't what it useter be ——'

Come Along opened one eye. The voice sounded as if something were the matter, and in the life of Come Along Smith Brown Jones nothing had ever been the matter before.

The large shadow came from the other side of the fence. It belonged to Daniel Digby Dubbeldimple Dipper, who was Come Along's nearest neighbor on the Colorado side — Big Dipper, for short, people called him — and he it was whose deep voice came rumbling across the fence.

Big Dipper was a bean farmer. He was a fat man, the shape of a barrel, of a big bulging billowing almost bursting butter barrel, and he had got his nickname from the way he dipped slowly up and down all day while he worked in his fields.

Now it was a strange thing that Big Dipper should be

doing so much talking this morning. It wasn't his way to say much, and before to-day Come Along had never heard him say anything except 'Mornin'' when it was early and 'Evenin'' when it was late. So he was surprised to hear the bean farmer muttering and complaining. But he was even more surprised — enough to open his other eye, in fact — when Big Dipper suddenly threw down the sack of beans he had been planting and stood still, sadly twiddling his thumbs. Never before had Come Along seen the busy Big Dipper stop work and twiddle his thumbs!

'You sound as if you had troubles, Big Dipper,' said Come Along, 'and you twiddle your thumbs as if you had mysteries. Move over a little, so your shadow will still fall this way, and tell me about it, and keep moving over and telling me.'

Big Dipper leaned against the fence and began with a sigh that shook six fence posts.

'Ever have a puppy dog?' he asked.

'Not steady,' replied Come Along.

'Mmph! Nor me either. Nor does anybody as minds his business sensible-like, growin' beans. Mmph! Puppy dog!' The words came out like so many little explosions. But then Big Dipper's voice grew softer and huskier and he added, 'But I did have me a boy an' a gal around. Not much bigger'n a young sprout, the boy

was, an' the gal a piece smaller'n him. And I got along pretty fair, havin' 'em around.' He heaved another sigh, and mournfully straightened out the fence where he had loosened it. Come Along wondered what it was Big Dipper had on his mind.

'It's like this,' Big Dipper explained. 'I was allus a bean farmer. My father before me was a bean farmer, an' my grandfather long before me farmed the beans as was the bean grandfathers of the beans what I farm. Our farm is the biggest in these parts — acres an' acres — an' our motto is Every Inch A Bean.

'In my time,' Big Dipper went on proudly, 'I have farmed white beans, black beans, speckled beans, soy beans, lima beans, navy beans, army beans, Mexican jumping-beans an' Canadian peaceful beans. I have farmed 'em all, barrin' jelly beans. Beans was all I had, beans was all I knowed, an' I figgered beans was all I — all I —' he gulped and wiped his eyes with a large red bandana handkerchief that had small bean designs on it — 'I figgered beans was all I would ever hanker fer.'

'I know,' said Come Along. 'I understand.'

'An' so I calc'lated as how beans was all the boy an' the gal hankered fer too. White beans, black beans, spec ——'

'I understand,' said Come Along, 'I know.'

'But one day they come to me, the boy an' the gal. They was makin' out fair to middlin', they says, if it wa'n't fer beans. Too many beans, they says. Jes' beans, they says, beans all mornin', beans all aft'noon — beans wa'n't enough. They was aimin' to have 'em a — a puppy dog!' Big Dipper popped the words out again, and he shook his head, as though a puppy dog would always be one too many riddles for him, a farmer of beans.

'I told 'em I didn't know how to get no puppy dogs for 'em. I told 'em I ain't never understood puppy dogs. "Besides," I says, "I'm too busy. I got no time," I says. "Run along," I says, "an' I'll plant some new beans for you, beans in new designs an' colors, beans with blue ribbons, beans as says 'Not to be opened till Christmas' on 'em, an' such like. I'll guarantee you a sight o' beans," I says.'

Big Dipper shrugged his pudgy shoulders.

'No, nothin' wouldn't do but they git 'em a puppy dog, they says, an' they needed him worse ever' day, they says, an' by that time it was so bad all the beans in the world wouldn't do no good. Then next day,' said Big Dipper, 'they slipped off. I ain't seen 'em since.' He turned to take a long look at his farm, and slowly shook his head.

'Beans is good company,' he went on, 'but they don't come an' kiss me in the mornin'. Their fingers don't go

roller skatin' over my bald head, evenin's. An' they don't never sneak up behind me times I'm busy, an' snap my suspenders. No,' he said wearily, 'tain't what it useter be.'

Come Along had been listening and thinking hard. For the first time in his life, he found, there was something the matter. He wasn't very well used to figuring hard — in fact, he had never really figured anything hard before in his life — but now he was doing his best.

He waited another moment before he spoke. Then he said, slowly:

'When you plant beans in the ground, Big Dipper, you plant them down, don't you? Down ——' And he wiggled his thumb downward. Big Dipper nodded. 'Then,' Come Along went on, 'the beans come up, don't they? Up ——' And he wiggled his thumb upward. Again Big Dipper nodded. 'Ah! Now, hold on a minute, and let me figure. *Shh!*' And for another long minute Come Along sat quite stiff, holding one finger up to keep Big Dipper quiet, and squinting his eyes close together while he figured.

Suddenly he jumped to his feet and cried: 'I got it! Look here, Big Dipper! I got an idea. I have a gunnysack full of dog biscuit in my shed. Now you take the dog biscuit, and you plant it — down!' Again he wiggled his thumb downward. Big Dipper stared, wide-

eyed. 'What comes up? Why, what would naturally come up? Puppy dogs!' Come Along wiggled his thumb upward. With each wiggle he grew more excited.

While Big Dipper watched Come Along's thumb, his own thumb went through the same motions, down for the dog biscuit, up for the puppy dogs.

'Now!' Come Along went on. '*Down* goes the dog biscuit!' Thumb down. '*Up* come the puppy dogs!' Thumb up. '*Then*, as soon as ever the puppy dogs come up — well, the boy and girl will come running back home!' And he made two fingers of his other hand come dancing through the air.

Big Dipper could hardly believe his eyes and ears. He leaned over the fence and whispered huskily: 'Do it again!' And he held his breath.

Come Along made the motions all over, ending with two fingers dancing through the air.

'Back come the boy and the girl!'

The big bean farmer let loose the breath he had been holding, and nodded his head so fast his fat cheeks jiggled like jelly.

Then Come Along went to the shed in back of his house and came back dragging a big gunnysack full of the dog biscuit. But when he reached the fence, he found Big Dipper leaning against it and shaking his head again.

'No,' Big Dipper said, ''tain't no use. The boy an' the gal — they won't know anything about these here dogs. A body would have to go out an' fetch 'em back, an' I don't know where they went.'

Here was another problem to figure. Come Along sat down again. He put his elbows on his knees and he put his chin in his palms. But he soon got another plan, which made him so happy he clapped his hands together and popped up like a jack-in-the-box.

'I'll fix that, Big Dipper!' he said, 'I would have nothing to do this afternoon except hang my legs over this rain barrel. I did that yesterday and the day before. To-day I'll have time to go out and look for your boy and girl!'

Big Dipper's eyes shone. A smile spread out over his face, making six new chins show under the two he had before. So happy he was to think of his boy and girl coming back, that he felt he had to go over Come Along's scheme again right away, to make sure of it.

'Let's practice!' he said. And he wiggled his thumb downward and shouted: 'Down go the dog biscuits!'

Come Along held up his own thumb, and answered: 'Up come the dogs!'

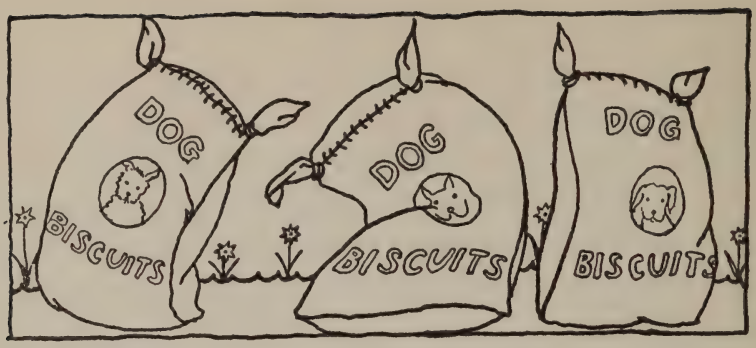
Then both together, they made their fingers go dancing through the air.

'Back come the boy and girl!'

But suddenly Big Dipper turned and picked up the gunnysack of dog biscuit.

'Got to git busy,' he said. 'Got me a new crop to raise now!' And he went dipping along with the gunnysack.

'I will look all over my home States until I find them, the boy and the girl,' said Come Along, as he watched Big Dipper busily dipping up and down in his fields, 'all over my four home States.'



III

Just ten seconds after Come Along had made up his mind about taking a trip, he was sitting on the bed in his house, hastily shuffling his feet into his shoetops. There were holes in both shoes, but he shuffled his feet until his toes stuck out the holes in the ends.

'When people go away on business,' he said to himself, 'they make their plans and lock the doors of their houses.' He packed up an apple for baggage and chuckled. 'I have plans, neat plans, made up in the back of my head. I will take them out as I need them. All I have to do now is lock the doors of my house.'

When he went to lock the screen door to the kitchen, he found there was no screen in it any more, but he hooked it shut anyhow and said, 'There.' Then he remembered that a big wind had blown the front door off its hinges long ago, but he went to the barn where he still

kept it, knelt down, picked up the key from the floor, turned it in the lock and said, 'That's that.'

'And now,' said Come Along, 'comes the question how to make the trip.'

In the barn were a horse, an automobile, and a bicycle. The horse's name was Trot Along, the automobile was Toot Along, and the bicycle Bump Along. They all stuck out in the places where they ought to have stuck in, and they all leaned over where they ought to have stood up straight.

Come Along felt of Trot Along's legs and frowned. He looked into Toot Along's works and sighed. He tested Bump Along's pedals and scratched his head.

'We'll draw lots to see which one gets to go,' he decided.

He picked three oat stems that grew beside the barn, two long ones and one short. Then he stood face to face with his horse Trot Along, and looked him in the eye.

'If I pull out a long stem,' he said, 'you don't go, on account of your three game legs.'

'Now, if I pull out the other long one,' he said, walking over to Toot Along, the automobile, 'you don't go, because of your missing back wheels.'

'*But*,' he announced, eyeing Bump Along between the handle-bars, 'if it's a short one, *you go*.'

He held up the three oat stems, even at the ends. He

shut his eyes tight and whirled himself around three times. Then, with his other hand, he pulled out one of the stems. It was long. He looked at his horse and shook his head. 'Sorry, but I can't take you, Trot Along. It's just as well, though,' he explained, 'because your ribs stick out so, and you are a little too bony on top for comfort.'

He pulled another stem. Long again.

'Too bad, Toot Along,' he told his automobile. 'Still, it's for the best, since your engine dropped out two years ago.'

Then he pulled out the last stem.

'Ah!' said Come Along, 'this is a lucky thing for you, Bump Along! *You go.*'

So he wheeled his bicycle to the road and hopped on. It creaked and squeaked and groaned, and at first it would scarcely move at all. He started coasting at the top of the long hill, and though Bump Along wobbled forward very slowly and complained loudly of rust in the joints, Come Along was too busy to notice any trouble.

'Hurray!' he cried. 'I'm off in a cloud of dust!'

Big Dipper was standing in the field, waving his red bandana.

'Good-bye!' called the farmer, and his deep voice added, with a catch in it, 'And good luck!'

IV

It was a long, easy, breezy hill that Come Along had started down, and a winding, raggedy, hobo sort of road that didn't much care where it went next and didn't give a hoot who knew it. As he coasted on, Come Along kept adding plans in the back of his head, saved up ready to use when he should need them.

'I'd better keep it a secret about the puppy dog crop,' he decided, 'until I find Big Dipper's boy and girl. The puppy dogs are for them, and maybe I hadn't ought to let anybody else know. Besides, I've never had a secret before. It puts a tickle under a person's ribs to have a secret.'

He chuckled, but as he went by the pine and aspen trees beside the road, it seemed to him they were leaning over as if they suspected a thing or two. He wondered what they could be thinking, so he smiled at them and nodded, pretending careless.

'Smooth going,' he remarked.

Out of the corner of his eye he saw them lean over a little further, but they only whispered back: 'Smooth going.'

Then he felt the secret tickle under his ribs again, and he whispered to himself: '*They* don't know!'

Columbines were watching him from the roadside, too. He stretched out his leg going around a curve and let the columbine petals brush against his toes lightly where they stuck out at the end of his shoe.

'Slick,' he told them, pretending careless.

The columbines only nodded, held up a leaf, and whispered to each other: 'Slick.'

Come Along snickered inside then, and told himself: '*They* don't suspect!'

The bicycle squeaked on until at last it reached the bottom of the long hill. It kept rolling, past a bright green soggy meadow, but more slowly now, until it came to a small bridge. It wobbled across. Then it began to hesitate. It got shaky in the axles. It stopped.

Come Along slid off and looked at it. Then he glanced ahead. Another long hill, but this time he was at the bottom and the hill went upwards.

'Your old trouble,' Come Along scolded at his bicycle. 'Whenever you get to the bottom of a hill you forget to keep going. And me in a hurry.' But he patted Bump Along on the seat and added, 'Still, we have come

a good way. We have got a lot done. We have earned a little rest.'

He wheeled the bicycle into the shade of a great loving cottonwood tree. Picking a spot between two fat cool root tops where the grass was tall and handsome, he sat down. He lay down. While the leaves above him played green and blue checkers with the sky, he closed his eyes.

Come Along was just settling his elbows and his knees where they wouldn't interfere with a nap when the wind blew a dandelion seed his way. The small white whirligig was puffed above his head and left twirling in the air. It floated down until it touched the tip of his nose, and there it balanced itself carefully until he opened his eyes to see what was tickling.

'Now, *that* never happened before!' he exclaimed. 'Right on the end of the nose! Something is doing. That wouldn't have happened just that way exactly unless something was doing.' He looked at the hill ahead, propped himself up, and opened his eyes still wider.

'Ah!' he said, 'I told myself so!'

V

SWINGING down the hill towards Come Along were a boy and a girl.

'Big Dipper's!' was his first thought. 'Well! Guess I'm a pretty good boy and girl finder, I am!' He smiled and dug his thumbs underneath his suspender gadgets.

But as the boy and girl came nearer, Come Along began to wonder how he was going to tell if they were Big Dipper's, and he suddenly found he had no way of making sure.

'And it's my fault,' he declared. 'I forgot to ask Big Dipper important questions. I forgot to ask him their names. I forgot to ask about their hair and their eyes. I didn't stop to find out whether their toes point in or out. I forgot to ask whether they sleep hunched up or stretched out.' He wound a blade of grass around his thumb nervously.

But when the boy and the girl saw Come Along they stopped and both took a long look and both smiled at him. To them he looked like a good person to tell secrets to. There was a friendliness about the way his toes stuck out through the bottoms of his shoes. There was a kindness about the way the blade of grass wound itself around his thumb. Besides, they liked the different colors of the patches on his pants. So they walked up and stood one on each side of him.

'We saw a horseshoe back yonder,' the girl said, 'and it had three nails in it.'

'That sounds good,' replied Come Along. 'Tell me about it.'

She sat beside him and took hold of his hand and whispered in his ear: 'The horseshoe was good luck. But

I think the three nails were extra! It means extra good luck for to-day.'

'Yes,' the boy said, 'and we blew the seeds off a dandelion back yonder, and what do you think happened? One of them floated away out of sight so far we couldn't see it any more!'

'That sounds good too,' answered Come Along. 'Let's have the facts on it.'

The boy sat on the other side of Come Along and took hold of his hand and whispered in his ear: 'The dandelion seeds are for many happy returns. But I don't know about the one that floated out of sight. Do you?'

'Maybe,' Come Along told him, 'it means something special for to-day, who can tell?'

When he said that, the boy and the girl suddenly turned to look at each other. Come Along watched and wondered. Dreamy looks were creeping into their eyes, and he could feel dreamy touches warming up in their finger-tips.

'You have a secret, you two,' he said. 'You know more about it than I do.'

'Yes,' the boy answered. 'I was just wondering ——'

'So was I,' added the girl. 'Just wondering if it might be ——'

But that's as far as they would go.

'Might be what?' asked Come Along, eagerly turning his head from one to the other.

They looked at each other again, and then they both said at one time: 'Our dog Wagsit.'

'Your dog!' exclaimed Come Along. 'Ah,' he thought to himself, 'now it *really* looks like they were the ones! But I don't see any dog.' He looked behind him, and up the road, but there was no dog in sight. He turned again to the girl. 'Well, where is this dog of yours?'

'Oh,' she said, 'We don't know — yet. You see, he's just — just *kind of* ours.' And she gazed longingly up the road ahead. 'The trouble with our dog is — he doesn't *know* he's ours.'

'Oh, he's ours, all right,' the boy insisted. 'We just haven't found him yet.'

'Maybe *you* know where he is!' the girl said, squeezing Come Along's fingers eagerly. 'Please, have you seen him, a big brown dog with black spots on one side and gray spots on the other?'

'He has black eyes,' the boy added. 'Did you see a dog with black eyes that shine in the night-time?'

'And a stubby tail!' the girl went on, 'and his name is Wagsit, because even if his tail isn't much, you see, he wags it.'

'Hmm!' said Come Along, making out as if it were a

big puzzle to him. 'You know him from end to end, and still, you've never seen him?'

'But we've thought of him so much,' the girl explained.

'We got to be old friends with him, looking for him so long,' said the boy. 'Good old Wagsit!'

By this time Come Along felt quite sure they were Big Dipper's boy and girl. So he told them about the puppy dog crop that was coming up on the bean farm.

'It's a secret,' he said. 'I'm only telling you two because I have reasons.' He watched them closely as he said this. Then he described all the different kinds of puppy dogs he expected would come up. He said Big Dipper ought to have one like Wagsit among the crop. He said Big Dipper had decided beans weren't enough for a boy and a girl, and that they should have all the puppy dogs they liked.

'And now,' he said, 'I've told you a secret, so you owe me one. I would like for you to tell me your names.' And he sat back, with his thumbs under his suspender gadgets, and waited.

'Mine is Lucky Day,' said the girl.

'Mine is Happy Day,' the boy told him.

'What?' Come Along sat up again and stared. 'You're sure,' he asked, 'the last part of your names isn't Dipper, of some kind? Haven't you left off part?

Don't you remember Big Dipper the bean farmer? And especially, don't you remember beans?'

No, no Dipper on their names, they said, and they didn't even remember beans.

'Now, *that's* a surprise!' said Come Along. 'Here I've gone and told you the secret, and you turn out to be the wrong ones. Well, it's too bad, but I guess I'd better start right off to find the right ones.'

He picked up his bicycle. He put one foot in the pedal, and was just ready to slip his other leg over, when he took another look at the two.

Happy Day and Lucky Day were thinking hard. So hard, Come Along could almost hear them thinking. So very hard indeed, he saw, that a tear was balancing itself alongside the edge of one of Lucky Day's eyelids, and Happy Day's mouth had got a little quiver in it.

'Do you think our dog Wagsit would know how to find us if he comes up in the bean farmer's puppy patch?' asked Lucky Day.

'We might be far away,' Happy Day murmured.

When Come Along heard that, he took his foot off the bicycle and wheeled it over to where they stood watching him.

'Look here,' he said. 'You aren't the ones, but I have figured out a plan. I got to look for Big Dipper's boy

and girl, but the way I figure, three lookers can look better than one.'

He nodded toward the handle-bars and he pointed to the mud-guard.

'Come along,' he said.

And Happy Day and Lucky Day forgot their troubles all at once, and hopped quickly on the bicycle.

VI

'We are in a big rush,' Come Along told his new friends as they started up the hill, 'but this bicycle makes better time going up hill if we get off and walk.' So they walked up the hills and rode down. When they came to the long level stretches they held out their shirts and the wind did its part.

But one time the wind turned against them. Bump Along slowed up, and stopped, and then, without warning, started to roll backwards. Come Along, Happy Day, and Lucky Day jumped off just in time to save falling off.

'If this bicycle is going to act like that,' said Come Along, 'we'll make better time if we just stop a while.' So they sat by the road, and while they waited for the wind to take the right slant again they began to eat wild

strawberries. In between strawberries Come Along told of his plans for finding Big Dipper's boy and girl.

'They must have gone this way,' he said. 'It's the only way they had. All we need to do is catch up. I'll see which way the wind is blowing now.' He picked up a handful of dust and tossed it above his head. It came straight down. 'Not blowing at all,' said Come Along, shaking the dust out of his hair. 'Let's get going again.'

They took their places on the bicycle and started off, and things went smoothly after that for a long time. But late in the afternoon Come Along peered ahead over Lucky Day's shoulder and cried: 'There!' And he pointed out a boy and a girl coming toward them.

Happy Day and Lucky Day were sure they were the ones, and started at once to yell and wave their arms, and Come Along got so excited he headed his bicycle straight for them. He pumped furiously, until he got going so fast he couldn't have stopped if he wanted to. It began to look as if there would be an accident.

Lucky Day gave a little scream. Quickly Come Along switched to the other side of the road, but just as he did so, the two people in the road switched over too. Come Along then turned back. But in hoping to get out of the bicycle's way, the others did exactly the same thing. The bicycle kept zigzagging, and so did they, and each

time they scurried to get out of the way they got back in it. After all, it ended up smack in an accident.

Happy Day bounced off the right side. Lucky Day was bumped to the left. But Come Along went sprawling into the road, with his long legs tangled up around the bicycle. When he tried to unwind himself, he only got more mixed up, and it wasn't until Happy Day and Lucky Day and the new boy and girl took hold of his arms and legs and untwisted him that he could get free.

The new boy felt gently of Come Along's knees and elbows.

'No bones broken,' he said.

The new girl smoothed his hair out of his eyes and wiped a smudge off the end of his nose with her handkerchief. She turned to Happy Day and Lucky Day and smiled.

'He will be all right,' she told them. 'He's just surprised.'

'He ought to take a rest,' said the boy. 'We know where there's a shack, up ahead of you.'

'It's getting late, and you could spend the night there,' the girl added.

Come Along, who had been blinking his eyes all this time and wondering what had happened, got up out of the road and looked them over.

They were twins, he decided. They both wore blue

overalls and both had bright red hair. One shoulder strap was torn on each of the overalls and they had large safety pins to hold the straps together. Their faces were exactly alike. So were their hands, so were their feet. So were their overalls and their safety pins. They looked almost like one person looking at himself in the mirror and they talked almost like one person calling and listening to his echo. They were smaller than Happy Day and Lucky Day, but there was a friendly kind of freckle on the tip of each one's nose.

'Now, after accidents,' Come Along told them, 'people are supposed to give their names. Shall we take turns telling names?'

'Hers is Tell Me,' one of the small strangers answered, pointing to the other.

'But — how about *you* telling *me?*' Come Along inquired.

'Please, sir, I *am* telling you,' he answered politely.

Come Along scratched his head.

'That's funny. I thought you were asking me!'

'No, sir. I was telling you her name is — Tell Me.'

'But —' Come Along shook his head and turned to the girl.

'His name,' said she, pointing to her brother, 'is How Come.'

'How Come?'

'Please, sir,' she very sweetly replied, 'I don't know how come, but that's what everybody calls him.'

Come Along sighed and slowly patted his forehead.

'Now I *am* mixed up! You don't know How Come and still you are his sister! Don't sisters usually know their brothers?'

'You see,' she said, gently taking hold of his hand, 'I know How Come, but I don't know how come that's his name.'

Come Along turned again to the boy.

'Well, then, tell me ——'

'That's her,' the boy said, pointing to his sister.

So Come Along, beginning to get a little dizzy, asked the girl.

'Now,' he began carefully, 'how come ——'

'That's him,' she said, pointing to her brother.

'Well, I give up!' Come Along announced. 'I take it for granted. I only wanted to find out how you got those names, but I give up.'

'Our father named us,' the boy said.

'It was the first thing our father said when we were born,' added the girl.

But now came the most important question. Come Along thought to himself, 'I forgot to ask Big Dipper if they were twins or — or just one plus one equals two.'

He looked at both together, and asked, 'Do you belong to a farmer named Big Dipper? And do you remember anything about beans, especially?'

'Not to any farmer,' said Tell Me.

'Not about beans, especially,' How Come added. 'We remember mostly about our dog.'

This made Come Along stare, wide-eyed. He looked at Happy Day and Lucky Day, and then back at the twins.

'Have you got a dog too?'

Yes, they had a very small dog, they explained.

'His name is Knee High,' said Tell Me. 'He has bangs on his forehead and they come down and get in his eyes, so he can't see very much. Maybe that's why he has missed us all this time. But we still want him.'

'Then you haven't even got him?'

'Not yet,' said How Come. 'But you know how it is,' he added hastily, 'when you want a dog so *much* — you want him and you keep on wanting him, and pretty soon you get to calling him your dog, even when you haven't got him — yet.'

'*You* know, don't you?' pleaded Tell Me.

Just then Happy Day said '*Pst!*' and motioned to Come Along to lean over.

'Maybe,' he whispered in Come Along's ear, 'maybe their dog will come up on Big Dipper's farm, too!'

'They would be a help,' Lucky Day whispered in his other ear, 'looking for the Dippers.'

'Think so?' Come Along asked both at once.

They nodded their heads.

'But four people!' he whispered. 'That makes four people, and all of you looking for your dogs, and none of you belonging to Big Dipper! But if you really think so ——'

Again they nodded their heads. So Come Along motioned to Tell Me and How Come to come close, and he whispered to them the secret about Big Dipper's farm and the puppy dogs that were expected. He ended up by asking them, 'Would you like to come along?'

Tell Me and How Come were just as excited as Happy Day and Lucky Day had been. So they shook hands all around, and were ready to be on their way. By this time Come Along had to put Tell Me and How Come on the handle-bars of his bicycle and Happy Day and Lucky Day had to ride together on the mudguard in back.

'Keep an eye out,' Come Along told the twins, 'for Big Dipper's boy and girl. Keep two eyes out.'

But all the rest of that day they bumped along without seeing any one. Just as the sun was setting they caught sight of the shack the twins had spoken about, and there they stopped.

VII

Rest and sleep were two of Come Along's favorite ideas, and he had planned on going to bed as soon as they reached the shack by the road. But for some odd reason — he couldn't even figure it out himself at first — he didn't go to bed early that night.

Instead, he sat on the doorstep of the shack, and there he stayed, long after the others had gone to sleep inside.

'I don't know why I sit here,' he murmured dreamily. 'I feel like taking a good snooze, but — here I sit. Well, we'll wait and see. Maybe I'll find out.' And he listened to the crickets talking long distance to each other and he looked up at the moon.

In front of the moon a circus parade was passing. Elephants, camels, giraffes, tigers. They floated by slowly, carelessly, and when they were gone they were gone. A silver sky circus it was, and the camels had big silver humps and the monkeys wore long curling silver tails.

IN FRONT OF THE MOON A CIRCUS PARADE WAS PASSING

Come Along watched the parade until the moon vanished behind a thick cloud. He listened to the crickets until they had told each other all they knew and stopped gossiping. He sat until everything was quiet, so quiet even the tree-tops had stopped hushing each other.

But suddenly, just as he was about to say to himself, 'Listen how quiet it is,' suddenly he heard words, faint small words from somewhere, sneaking into his ears. Far off at first, but coming nearer. Two voices, answering each other. Come Along held his breath and waited. At last he could make out what they were saying.

The first voice, a small, tired one, said: 'All day long we have looked and searched.'

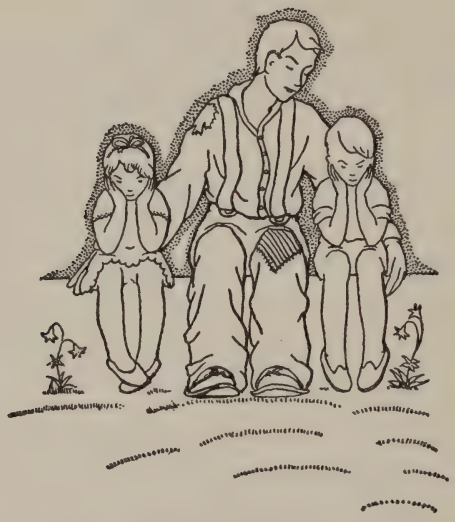
Then he heard the second voice, and it was more hopeful.

'But to-morrow will be all day long too,' it answered. 'As long as you've got to-morrows, there is still a chance of finding him. We don't give in.'

Come Along sat up. He tried to trace the words through the dark. This plan didn't work, but when they had come still a little closer, the starlight put him wise.

Two people, a boy and a girl, shuffled slowly to the doorstep. They looked very tired, and they flopped down on each side of Come Along, and sat with their

elbows on their knees and their chins in their palms, not saying anything.



'Now, these *must* be the ones!' Come Along said to himself. And he looked at them carefully, tilting their chins up with his thumb and investigating deep in their eyes.

But the only thing Come Along saw in their eyes was worries, tired worries, sad worries, worries that were almost ready to give up. Gently he put their chins back in the palms of their hands. He sat back and waited for them to explain.

'Our dog's gone,' said the girl, at last, as she stared straight ahead.

'Your dog?' Come Along leaned forward again. 'I didn't know you had a dog — yet.'

'Got him in a dream last night,' the boy answered. 'When we woke up he wasn't there any more. We've been looking for him all day.'

'Have you seen him anywhere?' asked the girl, turning to Come Along. 'He answers to the name of Flip-flop. He's a trick dog. You could tell him by the beautiful way he turns somersaults. Haven't you seen him — just *any*where?'

'Not yet,' Come Along replied. 'But lately I've heard a good deal about dogs. Now if you tell me your names, and if they are the right ones, I might be able to say where you can find him.'

'My name is Yours Truly,' the boy said quickly.

'I am Ever Yours,' added the girl.

'Not,' Come Along asked hopefully, 'not with a Dipper on the end of them?'

But there was no Dipper on the end of their names.

'Then that lets you out,' Come Along sighed. 'And just as I was hoping we might go back to-morrow to the farm where all the puppy dogs are coming up!' But as soon as he said that, Come Along clapped his hand over his mouth.

The boy and the girl jumped up.

'What farm? Where is it?' they began to ask.

'It's a secret,' Come Along explained. 'I wasn't supposed to tell. I take it back.' But they kept asking so many questions, and they looked so tired, that he ended up by telling them the whole story.

'And do you suppose our dog might be there too?' asked Yours Truly.

They looked *so* worried, Come Along couldn't help hoping their dog might turn up somewhere.

'We are good at looking for people,' said Ever Yours. 'Couldn't we help you to find the Dippers?' And timidly, she added, 'May we — would it be too much trouble if we — come along?'

'Well,' said Come Along, 'you *could* be a help. I made plans, neat plans too, but now it looks like I need help. It looks like it would be a good thing if you two would come along.'

Yours Truly and Ever Yours wanted to start off right away for the puppy dog farm, but Come Along reminded them it was bedtime, and that the others were already asleep, and he pointed inside the door of the shack. So they kissed him good-night and went in.

Come Along sat on the doorstep, putting more plans in the back of his head. He looked up and saw the silver sky circus on its way back. He watched the horses and acrobats float by slowly, carelessly, and noticed that when they were gone they were gone.

VIII

When Come Along opened his eyes next morning, he found himself still sitting on the doorstep. He went inside the shack and saw that everybody was wide awake except Tell Me and How Come, the twins. They were still sleeping, full speed.

'We ought to get going,' he announced. He wiggled Tell Me's ears, but she only rolled over.

'Look!' cried the others, pointing to Tell Me's brother How Come.

Come Along looked and jumped in surprise. For How Come's ears had wiggled by themselves, and he had rolled over the same way. Then Come Along rumpled up How Come's red hair to wake him. But he only rolled back the other way. At the same time, Tell Me's red hair rumpled up by itself, and she rolled back too. Come Along wiggled Tell Me's toe. How Come's toe wiggled by itself. But all this time they were still asleep, full speed.

'Ah!' said Come Along, 'I get it now! One of you wiggle Tell Me's ears. And at the same time, another one wiggle How Come's toe. Then let's see what happens!'

Happy Day and Lucky Day tried this plan, and sure enough the twins suddenly sat up, wide awake.

'Now,' said Come Along, 'before we start it's best to count noses. That's one way we can always tell how many — how many noses we got, anyway.' He stood them all in a line and began counting. Happy Day, Lucky Day, Tell Me, How Come, Yours Truly, Ever Yours, Come Along Smith Brown Jones — But when he came to the end of the names, his counting finger went on, two more times.

'I don't understand,' he said. 'There are two noses left over. We haven't got enough names to go around for our noses. Either we lost two names or we found two noses. Better try some arithmetic on this.' He paused and scratched his head. 'Now let's see. I'll try subtracting two.' He picked up Yours Truly and Ever Yours and hid them in a corner of the shack. Then he counted again. 'No,' he said, 'that doesn't work. Well, add two.' And he picked them up again and put them back. 'But that doesn't do it either. Well, then, put down one and carry two.' He sat Lucky Day on the floor and he took up Tell Me and How Come, one under

each arm, and carried them around the room. Then he counted again, but shook his head. 'I'm mixed up now. There are still two noses too many.'

'You didn't count us.'

The voice came from a small mouth underneath one of the new noses. Come Along wheeled about and stared open-mouthed. For there at the end of the line were two more, two he had never noticed before.

'Well, who'd have thought *you* were here!' Come Along exclaimed. 'And by the way, who *are* you?'

'I'm If You Please,' the first one said. She had soft gray eyes and one of her socks was down.

'I was named Just For Fun,' said the other. His pockets were full of apples, and to show he wanted to make friends, he passed them around for breakfast.

'We came last night,' If You Please explained, 'and you were asleep on the doorstep. So we waited to ask you if you have seen anything of our dog Second Bounce.'

'Aha,' Come Along thought. 'Dog, eh? At last it looks like we are on the right track.' And he began to ask them more questions.

'Why did you name your dog that?'

'Because he was against the rules,' Just For Fun answered. 'I guess that's why we never really had him. Where we come from, he wasn't allowed. But we have hopes.'

'Now, about *your* names,' Come Along went on. 'Are your names Dipper Just for Fun, of If You Please Dipper?' But they shook their heads, and while he watched them, his head shook also. 'But don't you come from the bean farm where Big Dipper is growing all the puppy dogs?' As soon as he had said that, Come Along again clapped his hand over his mouth. 'That was a secret I asked you, that time,' he explained.

But now Just For Fun and If You Please began asking questions themselves, and they asked so many that at last Come Along had to tell them the secret.

'And dogs aren't exactly against our rules,' he ended up, 'and if you're anxious about whether your dog Second Bounce is happy and what they are feeding him and how is his health, I guess you'd better come along.'

But before they started out again, Come Along decided to check up. So he wrote everybody's name on the wall of the shack. Happy Day, Lucky Day, If You Please, Just For Fun, Tell Me, How Come, Yours Truly, Ever Yours, Come Along Smith Brown Jones.

'Ha, it checks up!' he announced, and he went out to get his bicycle. But when others followed and gathered around him, he stood and looked at Bump Along and scratched his head.

'One here,' he said, pointing to the handle-bars, 'two here — no, two here and three there ——'

While Come Along was puzzling away, a horse came by, pulling a wagon. On the wagon sat a man with long black whiskers. He kept crying 'Giddap! Giddap, I say!' But the more he shouted, the more slowly the horse walked, and when they got to Come Along he stopped altogether.

'Good-morning,' the man puffed, wiping his forehead. 'It's my birthday and I'm to have a party this afternoon with all my friends over. I'm on my way to town now to have the barber shave off these whiskers so I'll look slicked up. But my horse goes so slowly, I know before I can get back for the party I'll grow whiskers all over again. Will you trade me your bicycle for my horse and wagon?'

Come Along brightened. 'You're on!' he exclaimed. 'That is, you're on as soon as you get off.' The man got down and took Bump Along, while Come Along and his friends clambered into the wagon. 'Now there will be room for us all to go to the puppy dog farm!' But when Come Along said that, he remembered, too late, that it was a secret. 'There I go again! I didn't mean to say it,' he told the whiskered man. 'So don't remember it.'

But the stranger only stared at him and smiled and rode away.

Come Along took hold of the reins, and the horse plodded on.

'May we go too?' asked one of the people sitting beside Come Along on the driver's seat.

He looked down and started. Two new ones were sitting with him! Two more he hadn't seen before.

'Now, how did *you* get here?'

'We were here all the time,' said one, a boy. 'We were getting a lift.'

'Where to?'

'Anywhere,' said the boy's sister, 'anywhere our dog might be.'

'Are you the ones?' Come Along asked suddenly. 'The Dippers?'

'My name is Shut Your Eyes,' the boy said.

'Mine is Make A Wish.' The girl had yellow hair, and when she talked it was like singing early in the morning.

Of course Shut Your Eyes and Make A Wish had heard the secret of Big Dipper's puppy dog crop when Come Along let it out, and they told him about the dog they were looking for.

'We have to find him,' said Shut Your Eyes, 'because we wished we had him but he got away from our wishes. He is a hard dog for wishes to catch.'

'His name,' said Make A Wish, 'is Old-Timer.'

IX

'The sunflowers stand high along here,' said Come Along as his wagon bumped and jolted on. 'A Dipper could hide behind them. Better keep your eyes open.'

'I would like to find the Dippers,' said Make A Wish, the girl with the yellow hair, 'and then scoot for the puppy dog farm, zip!' But her small brother Shut Your Eyes shook his head.

'This horse doesn't scoot,' he said. 'He needs something to make him anxious, the way we are.' And he added earnestly, 'I am very anxious. All the time I am getting more anx ——' He stopped in the middle of the word, and then he yelled, 'Look!' and pointed ahead.

Two people, a boy and a girl, had stepped from behind the tall sunflowers and were standing in the road. They were looking this way, that way. The girl pointed toward Come Along's wagon.

'I think he went that way,' she said.

'We could tell by his tracks,' said the boy, 'if only he would make some tracks.' He had a friendly face, the new boy, and dirty knees. He crouched down in the road to find the tracks, but shook his head. 'That dog *never* has made any tracks!' he complained. Then he saw Come Along.

'Have you seen any dog tracks along this road, please?' he asked.

'Very small ones,' the girl added. 'Because if you have, they belong to our dog. His name is Out For The Afternoon.'

Come Along hadn't seen any tracks, but he thought these two had Dipper looks about them, so he asked them the big question right away. No, they said they weren't the ones. Their names were only Sticky Fingers and Save Me A Lick, they said, and their parents' names were Lollymom and Lollypop.

Come Along listened and then leaned over and began to talk in private to Make A Wish.

'If their dog hasn't even made tracks,' he whispered in Make A Wish's ear, 'maybe he hasn't come up yet, and maybe we ought to take them with us to the farm. Besides, we got room now. Two more won't matter.'

Make A Wish nodded, so he invited the newcomers to come along.

While Sticky Fingers and Save Me A Lick were climb-

TWO PEOPLE, A BOY AND A GIRL, HAD STEPPED FROM BEHIND THE TALL SUNFLOWERS

ing on in front, four of their friends who had been helping them to hunt their dog among the sunflowers thought Come Along was inviting them too, and they joined the others in the back of the wagon, and were told the puppy dog secret. When they came to the next crossing, these four called to two of *their* friends who lived in a house at the crossing. They came running out, and when they heard the secret they also hopped on the wagon, forgetting even to wave good-bye to the house where they lived.

By the time they came to the town where the man with the black whiskers had gone, the town where the barber shop was, they found that he had been there and had let out the secret about Big Dipper's puppy dogs. For eight people were sitting by the side of the road, looking as if they had waited a long time.

'Here he comes!' one of them cried, and all jumped up and ran to meet Come Along's wagon, and the ones who hadn't forgotten their handkerchiefs that day waved them at Come Along, and the others called to him and to his friends and also to his horse.

They came up in twos, and each two carried a great bulging lunch-basket between them.

'If you will take us along with you to the puppy dog farm,' one of them said, 'we will go halvers with you on the lunch.'

Come Along and his friends had forgotten about lunch.

'Ah!' he said, '*you* may come along indeed!'

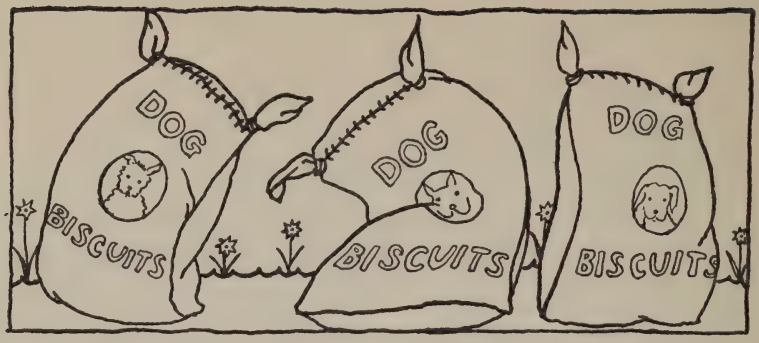
But there were two of the new people who only stood in the road, holding each other's hands while their friends tumbled into the wagon. One was a boy with wide eyes and a button off his shirt, and the other a barefoot girl. They were the smallest of the crowd, and they made no noise at all.

'No dog to look for?' Come Along asked them.

The boy nodded his head, but showed that his hands were empty.

'No lunch basket,' he said.

Come Along quickly jerked his thumb toward the back of the wagon and closed one eye. One jerk and one wink were enough. They gleefully piled in with the others and shook hands all around.



X

STORIES go faster than wagons in that part of the country. The story of Big Dipper's puppy dog farm flew on ahead of Come Along's wagon, so far ahead there was no chance to catch up with it.

Three times along the road they were stopped that afternoon, and each time they started again there were two more puppy dog hunters in the back of the wagon. Come Along's horse began turning his head and looking back, with a strange worry in one eye and a sorry reminder in the other.

'It's getting wobbly up on this wagon seat now,' Come Along observed.

'Yes,' said Sticky Fingers, who was sitting on Come Along's knee to make room for a couple of newcomers, 'and it's getting squeaky in back. It gets wobblier and squeakier each time somebody gets on.' And even while he talked, a boy and a girl came running down a path to the road, waving their arms and holding a small dog

collar they had brought along. The boy gave his sister a boost, and then boosted himself. A loud groan came from one of the wagon wheels.

'I was just hoping,' Sticky Fingers went on, 'that we'd get to the dog farm before — before ——' He stopped — listened. A funny peculiar crackling noise

was coming out of the wagon from underneath. Another strange funny peculiar crackle came after it. And then a crash — crack, split, slambang, slide, flop, bump! The wagon had broken in half!

Come Along's hair stood up on end. He swung about to see what had happened.

The bottom of the wagon was in the middle of the road. All his friends were scattered heels up, heads down along both sides. But they somersaulted two or three times while he watched, and ended up heels down, heads up. As soon as they stopped rolling and saw how

each other looked, they began to laugh, and nobody was hurt because all were too busy laughing.

Come Along, still sitting on the driver's seat on the front half of the wagon, and looking as if he were about to drive a two-wheeled chariot perched up on stilts, stared and scratched the back of his head.

'It looks like an accident!' he said at last. Then he climbed down to see what could be done. But no sooner was he on the ground than he stopped suddenly and glanced up at the sky.

'And now something else is happening!' he exclaimed, and he began to rub a spot behind his ear, for something hard had come down and bounced off his head, *bink*. A dark cloud was hurrying across the sky, and at that very moment two more hard somethings bounced off Come Along's head, *bink bink*. Then a whole skyful of the binkers began to drum a tattoo on the heads of Come Along and his friends. They ducked under the trees and the bushes, and they tilted up the bottom of the wagon, where as many as could fit snuggled together.

'Anyway,' Come Along told the others, 'hailstorms wear out quick.'

It turned out that he was right, and when the storm was over, he began walking up and down the road and making guesses what to do. But a little further on, he

noticed a great heavy beautiful automobile truck, pulled over to one side.

Sitting on the ground beside the truck, with his knees hunched up between his arms, was the driver. He was a great husky man, who went without a shirt, and as Come Along came nearer, he noticed also that the man's big chest was heaving angrily underneath his red flannel underwear. His face was red too, and his hands were about the size of nine pounds of sirloin steak.

'It's a fine fix,' the truck driver was muttering, 'a *fine* fix!' He picked up a pebble and tossed it away, and for a change he said, 'A elegant fix!'

Come Along sat beside him and inquired about the fix.

'Three days ago,' began the discouraged truck driver, 'I loaded up this truck for the carnival they are having in town. Confetti and whirligigs, I loaded. When I got halfway to town, the wind started the whirligigs to whirling, and POOF!' He said it so loud it made Come Along jump. 'They whirled all the confetti out of the truck! Then when I got to town, where was I? In a fix, yes.' He gave the truck a hard look.

'Yesterday I loaded this truck up with hot dogs and butter for the carnival. I put the butter in front and the hot dogs in back. I got halfway to town. Then the sun got so hot the butter melted, and SLOSH!' Again Come Along jumped. 'The butter slopped out the back end of

the truck. That made it so slippery that the hot dogs slithered off. One by one they slipped off while I was driving, without even warning me. When I got to town, where was the butter? Gone! Where were the hot dogs? Escaped! Where was I? Yes, in a fix.'

'And to-day!' he went on, almost exploding with every word, and getting hot under his red flannel underwear, 'to-day I load this truck up with balloons for the carnival. I blow up the balloons — red-pink-yellow-green — what does it matter now? I tie them up neat with strings. I load them up to the top of this truck. I pile them up high above the top. I work all night blowing and tying and piling up. I start out. I get halfway. Then — BINK!' This time Come Along almost jumped out of his shoes. 'Bink, the hailstones hit the balloons.' He flung up his nine-pound-steak hands. 'Now where am I?'

'Ah,' said Come Along, 'in a fix. It sounds like poor luck, a hard luck story. It looks like your truck is bad business for you. How would you like to try changing your luck on a horse?'

'That sounds better,' the truck driver said. 'You got a horse?'

So Come Along traded his horse for the truck, and by the time the driver hopped up and rode away, his face looked much brighter.

Come Along climbed into the cab of the truck, and called to his friends to come a-running. But before they got there, he heard talk going on in the back of the truck. He looked over his shoulder and got another big surprise.

'Now how did I collect *them*?' he demanded.

For in the back of the truck were fourteen people, fourteen new ones! A boy with straw-colored hair began talking with Come Along through the little window in the back of the cab. He explained that he and his friends were busy making little balloons out of broken pieces of the big balloons. When they put the pieces of the old balloons in their mouths, they came out new little balloons. Then they popped the little balloons on their chins and their knees.

'All the balloons in the world are more fun than all the bubbles,' said the straw-haired boy's sister.

'But all the dogs in the world are more fun than the balloons,' said the seventh one from the left, as he popped a balloon on his big toe for a change.

'Dogs last longer,' another one added. 'But we have no dogs — yet,' and she thoughtfully popped a blue balloon behind her ear.

When the rest of Come Along's crowd got there, they heard the talk about dogs and thought Come Along had let out the secret again. So they began to explain Big

Dipper's farm to the new ones, and soon there were so many questions buzzing about that the questions began bumping into their own answers.

Come Along asked for quiet, and then he asked each one separately if he had come from Big Dipper's farm. But nobody had.

'Well, anyway, here we go,' he said, while Yours Truly and Ever Yours helped him start the engine. 'And because you new ones are in on the secret, and because there's room, you all might as well come along.'

XI

Ever Yours was sitting next to Come Along in the driver's seat, telling him how proud she and Yours Truly would be of their puppy dog when at last they would reach Big Dipper's farm. The truck was just passing under a great cottonwood tree, when — *Crash! Bang! Shiver! Shudder!* — something happened in back of them that made them jump a foot.

Come Along peeped over his shoulder. A whole house had fallen from somewhere into the truck! But Come Along had become used to surprises, and it was a very small house, so he didn't even stop driving.

'Now where could that have come from, I ask you?'

'The cottonwood tree,' said Ever Yours. 'It looks like a tree house.'

It was indeed a tree house, and out of the door and the windows crept six people, all scared.

'It slipped,' one of them said.

'It got loose,' said another. 'That explains it.'

They looked so very scared and so badly shaken up that Come Along said Ever Yours might tell them the secret about Big Dipper and the puppy dogs. When she whispered it to them, they forgot about being scared, and they answered that it had always been their ambition to have a puppy dog, and they asked if they might stay in the truck. Ever Yours looked at Come Along, and saw him wink one eye and nod his head.

But the six new ones had no sooner thrown the tree house overboard and settled in their places than Come Along heard a rushing, swishing noise, and then another bang, and a bump and a bounce. Coming from somewhere up above, he had seen heads, heels, hands, all mixed up, the heels over the heads, flying through the air. After the bump and the bounce, he noticed that all of a sudden there were four new faces in the truck!

The four new ones were just as scared and shaken up as the six tree-house climbers had been, but after a moment, one of them, a boy with a turned-up nose and a vacant space where two teeth used to be, spoke up. He explained that they had built a slide at the side of the road. You climb to the top, he explained, and you sit down and you zip to the bottom. Then you whirl up in the air and land on a pile of hay.

'Just when we were trying it four at a time,' he went

on, 'along came this truck, and down zipped us, into the truck instead of the hay.'

That was how the six tree-house climbers and the four sliders came into Come Along's crowd. But there were others that afternoon, too. Some of them were picked up as they hailed the truck along the road. Some bounced in, one way or another, some slipped in, some jumped on the back end. They kept coming along. They filled up the inside of the truck. They sat with their feet dangling out. They climbed on the front end and sat on the engine hood and the bumpers. And more and more, they kept coming along.

Sticky Fingers, the brother of Save Me A Lick, was perched on Come Along's shoulders, and he had to lean forward to keep from bumping his head on the roof of the cab.

'I've been thinking,' he said in Come Along's ear, 'about when we will get to Big Dipper's farm, and about maybe being too late. Do you think so? All the time, you know, it seems to get later.'

'I'm not sure myself,' replied Come Along. 'We will do our best.' And he speeded up the truck, which went tooting along the road, bouncing and rocking those in back.

Now and then he would turn about and ask: 'Is there anybody there with a Dipper on his name?'

No Dippers showed up that afternoon, but so many other people did that before long all the places in the truck were packed tight, and all those who had laps big enough to sit upon were sat upon.

If You Please and her brother Just For Fun were put up on the roof of the cab with eight or ten others because there was no more room.

As she squeezed over to make room for two more who had just got on, If You Please leaned over the back of the cab to talk to Come Along through the little window there.

'I've been trying to remember what this truck reminds me of,' she said, 'and now I know. I have a cousin in New Mexico who has a cousin in Arizona who has a cousin in Utah who has a cousin in Colorado whose father owns a trailer that fits to the back of a truck. It's a very handy thing to have.'

'Colorado,' Come Along told her, 'is just up over the next hill.'

'And that,' said If You Please, 'is important because it's where my fourth cousin lives. If we stop at the next house over the hill I can borrow her father's trailer because we are relations.'

On the other side of the hill they stopped and If You Please jumped down and ran into a house by the side of the road. She came out smiling.

'THEY HAVE ADDED THEIR TRICYCLES AND THEIR SCOOTERS TO THE END OF THE COASTER WAGONS AND PLAY CARTS'

'That means luck,' said Come Along.

But If You Please also came out with eighteen of her cousin's cousins, who decided they, too, needed to go to the farm of Big Dipper.

'That means more luck, one kind or another,' Come Along said, as he backed up the truck and hitched the trailer to it.

'Their names have no Dippers on them,' said If You Please, with a wide blue wish in her eyes, 'but they have been talking about their dogs *so* long!'

'Well, well, we have room for them now,' Come Along replied, and he said they might come along, and he shook hands with If You Please.

The truck and the trailer started off, but they had gone only a short way when If You Please asked Come Along to stop in front of some more houses past the hill. Friends of If You Please's cousins lived in those houses, and they had gathered, a large crowd of them, by the road.

'No Dippers on their names either,' If You Please told Come Along, with the same wide blue wish in her eyes, 'but — but they are *so* small, and they need dogs *so* much!'

'Well, well, we have this many,' said Come Along, 'and when you got this many it doesn't matter how many more you get. They may come along too, because

you got the trailer to make more room for us.' And he shook hands again with If You Please as he stopped to pick up the new ones.

The truck and the trailer weren't quite large enough, but Come Along was too busy driving to notice it.

'I wonder,' he said, as he drove along, 'how they are managing back there.'

Tell Me and How Come were sitting each one on a headlight, looking back at the crowd, and they answered him.

'They have tied an old wagon to the end of the trailer,' said Tell Me.

'They have attached a cart to the end of the wagon,' said How Come.

'And they have hitched their coaster wagons and their play carts to the end of that,' Tell Me went on.

'Besides,' said How Come, 'they have added their tricycles and their scooters to the end of the coaster wagons and play carts.'

'And the last one is hanging on with one roller skate at the tail end.'

'That is how they are managing.'

XII

Come Along decided, as twilight came on, that it might be a wise plan to hurry all these people on to the farm of Big Dipper, and to leave them there, so that he could go out by himself again and look for the right ones.

'Two or three lookers,' he told Ever Yours, who was sitting on the lap of Happy Day who was sitting on the lap of Sticky Fingers who was sitting on the lap of Save Me A Lick, 'two or three lookers can look better than one, but two or three hundred is some to spare. So now we are bound for the puppy farm.'

When they heard that, those near Come Along sent the word on back, and a joyful yell went up from the crowd. They began to shout for more speed, and Come Along gave them what they wanted. The carts and scooters and tricycles in back bounced along so fast, it

was a big job to stay on, but still they kept yelling for more speed.

Come Along didn't stop that night. All night long he drove on. He told Happy Day and Lucky Day to take turns keeping him awake by poking him in the ribs whenever his head began to nod. Those on the truck fell asleep, and when those farther back got tired, they traded places with the ones on the truck. All night long they traveled on, sleeping and trading places and sleeping again — all except Come Along, whose ribs were faithfully poked by Happy Day and Lucky Day whenever his head nodded.

By morning the truck began to get shaky in the axles. It also developed a polite cough. And still, whenever they passed through a town, more people climbed on. After they had gone through four towns, the truck reached the beginning of a long hill. It made a start, coughed two or three times, and then stopped. Come Along got out and put his finger on the radiator, but quickly jerked it away again.

'Sick,' he announced. 'Has a fever.'

'Everybody had better get out and walk up,' said Lucky Day.

She and her brother chased them off the truck, the trailer, the wagon, the cart, the tricycles, scooters, and the roller skate. Then the truck gave a weary wheeze and

a jerk, a cough and a spurt, and they all trudged after it up the hill.

At the top they came upon a railroad track gleaming in the morning sunlight. At one end it disappeared in a point, but at the other end where it disappeared there was also a feather of smoke.

'Where there's smoke,' said Come Along, 'there's anything from a kitchen stove to a hot potato. It's worth looking into.'

They stood and stared down the railroad track. They watched the feather of smoke become a puff and the puff become a cloud. At length they made out, coming over the track, a long lonesome freight train, clicking and clanking.

When the train came near, it slowed up as though it were looking for something. It stopped. A man stepped off the caboose and ran toward Come Along.

'Hi there!' he called. 'We are in a fix. We need help.'

'We are too,' replied Come Along. 'Let's take turns telling each other.' He climbed off the truck and sat on a rail near the cowcatcher of the locomotive. 'You first,' he suggested.

'Well,' began the freight man, 'on this train is a carload of white mice being sent to California for a vacation. Their mother and father live in Altoona, Pennsylvania.'

'It's a long way from home,' remarked Come Along.

'They hope to make friends quick,' the man explained. 'But in the car in front of them on this train is a carload of mousetraps. They are being sent to Flagstaff, Arizona, to get jobs. They come from Chicago.'

'That's taking a chance,' said Come Along.

'Well, they are brand new,' the man explained, 'and they have hopes. But — the trouble is, the white mice are sneaking into the mousetraps by mistake. They are very young mice. They don't know any better. It isn't good for the mousetraps and it isn't healthy for the mice.'

'I see,' said Come Along.

'I've been trying to keep those mice out of the mousetraps all the way from Denver, Colorado,' the man complained, 'but one man can't do it. Two men can't. Three can't. Four, five, six, seven ——'

'I know,' said Come Along. 'I get it.'

'You have a good many friends traveling with you,' the man observed, looking about him.

'I have as many friends as you have mice traveling with you,' Come Along said. 'They would be good helpers to keep the mice out of the traps. Do you go as far as the farm of Daniel Digby Dubbeldimple Dipper the bean farmer?'

'We pass there on our way.'

'Then we are willing to watch mice for you that far.'

They shook hands, and Come Along and all his friends left the truck, the trailer, the wagon, the cart, the tricycles and scooters, and the roller skate, and eagerly piled on the train.

'Do you make stops on the way?' Come Along asked.

'Yes, we stop at fifteen towns before we come to the Dipper farm.'

Come Along sat on the lumber heaped on a flat-car and scratched his head as the train started rolling along.

'I wonder,' he murmured, 'if stories go faster than trains in this part of the country.'

XIII

'All aboard for Big Dipper!' cried one of the friends of the cousins of the cousins of If You Please. He was sitting on the back end of the engine tender, and his call went on down the line all the way to the caboose as the train started rolling on its way.

'All aboard for the puppy dogs!' others yelled.

'Whoopee! Here we go!'

They set up such a noise the locomotive gave up in despair trying to ring its bell, and the chugging and even the steam whistle were drowned out.

But the white mice had to be kept healthy, and the mousetraps new, so a part of the crowd got to work at this job, and the others waited for their turn at it. While they waited they sat on top the box-cars, or they climbed over the stone and lumber on the flat-cars, or they scrambled up on the sand in the gondola-cars.

They let their heels dangle, tapping a hurrying tune against the sides of the cars while they went rolling and rocking along.

'It's a lovely way to travel,' Ever Yours told her brother Yours Truly, as they perched on the front end of a car packed full of chickens, cackling and clucking inside. 'Only I hope we're not too late.'

They watched the tree-tops wave Good Luck. They listened to the water tanks and the block signals whisper So Long, as they swished by. They nodded their heads at the telegraph wires swinging up and down above them and motioning them to Hurry On, Hurry On, Hurry On.

'More speed!' somebody called as the train rounded a curve. That started the yelling all over again, all along the train.

'Let's go! Let's give her all she's got! Whoopee!'

Come Along joined in the excitement until his turn came to help keep the white mice out of the traps. He hurried over the cars until he came to the right one, and there he took his place among the others who were guarding the traps.

'This is a snap job,' he said, as he flicked a couple of mice away. 'This was a good bargain.'

But he had only been there a few minutes when a wide-awake boy with snaps in his fingers and a whistle in his lips to warn the mice away took his place. Come

Along climbed out of the car and balanced himself along the tops of the others, all the way to the locomotive.

The engineer was blowing the whistle and the train was beginning to slow down for the next stop. Come Along asked if they were on time.

'We're on time, all right,' the engineer replied, '— but ——' And he stared out of the window. 'What is that big crowd for on the station platform? Crowds like that, waving their handkerchiefs and cheering, never wait for freight trains to come in.'

About two hundred people were standing on the platform, throwing their caps in the air and shouting and clapping their hands. A hundred boys and a hundred girls. It looked like a great glad holiday.

'Big Dipper!' the new ones cried. 'We've got to go see Big Dipper!'

Come Along leaned out of the cab window. He stared at them in wonder, and tried to think how they could have got word of Big Dipper's puppy farm.

'How did *you* know?' he asked one of them. 'It was a secret.'

'Oh, we got it all right!' was the answer.

'It came along over the telegraph wires,' another said. 'We know all about the puppy dog farm.'

'We need to go there,' a small girl, standing on tiptoe, told Come Along in private. 'We have reasons.'

'Reasons?'

'Puppy dog reasons. Special puppy dog reasons,' she answered.

'And no puppy dogs to go with them,' added her brother.

When he heard that, Come Along held up his hand to quiet the throng. They stopped shouting and crowded up close to hear what he would say.

'Because you all have reasons,' said Come Along, 'and because some have special reasons, I expect you had better ——' and he made a motion of his thumb toward the back of the train.

They let out two hundred whoops all at once, when they saw the wiggle of Come Along's thumb, one hundred glad boy whoops and one hundred happy girl whoops, and they made a dash to climb aboard.

'All aboard?' called the brakeman.

'All aboard!' went the chorus of the two hundred new ones, and again the train pulled out. It went rattling on for about twenty minutes, when it came to the next station.

There, to the engineer's amazement, it was the same story all over, only this time there were two hundred and sixty waiting on the platform.

When they told Come Along they also had reasons, and special reasons, he looked at the engineer. The

engineer nodded, and supposed it would be all right, just that once. So again Come Along made the motion with his thumb, and the two hundred and sixty let out that many whoops and jumped on.

'All aboard?'

'All aboard!'

The same thing happened at the third station. Then it happened all over at each station after that. Sometimes there would be two hundred, sometimes three hundred. Each time, when Come Along had listened to their reasons and their special reasons, he would turn to the engineer. And each time that the engineer nodded his head, he nodded it more slowly, and he added more firmly, 'But just this once.'

The long freight train was filling up with people. Places to sit were getting scarce. They had passed the last station before Big Dipper's farm, when Come Along suddenly asked the engineer to stop again.

'We are late now,' the man said. 'Is it important?'

Come Along pointed to a fence. Two small people were sitting there, watching the train go by and waving their hands. A boy and a girl, and they waved so anxiously, and watched so eagerly, and there was such a feeling of wishes in the way they dangled their heels, that Come Along felt sure they must have had a couple of reasons too. But the engineer shook his head.

'Can't do it,' he said. 'We are too late.' And the train went on. But Come Along kept looking back, and long after they had left the two on the fence behind, he went on thinking about them, and wishing he might have stopped for them.

'They had wishes in their heels, those two,' he kept saying to himself, 'and wishes in their faces. And I liked the way they waved their hands. And what's more, they had Dipper looks about them, those two,' Come Along kept thinking, as the train rattled on.

At the beginning of the next hill, he could see, peeping over the top, the tip of the old windmill on Big Dipper's farm. But as he watched, he wondered why it didn't seem to come any nearer. Then he noticed that the locomotive was having trouble. The wheels were slipping on the tracks, he noticed, and though it puffed and jerked and tried so hard it shook all over, it was getting nowhere.

'Can't make it,' said the engineer. 'Load too heavy.'

'Well,' Come Along told him, 'the farm of Big Dipper is just over this hill. We'll walk the rest. Thanks for the freight train ride.'

He hopped down, and as he did so, word went all the way back that the puppy farm was just over the hill. When they heard that, all quickly piled off.

Come Along looked back, and wondered how many

there were now. But there was no use trying to count. He could only make a guess, and his guess was about a thousand. As far as he could see they were hopping off the cars.

But while Come Along stood watching, those in front began to race up the hill like a wild stampede, whooping and yelling the names of their pet dogs, and kicking up a great cloud of dust. When the others in back started making a dash to catch up, Come Along wheeled about and saw what was going on.

'Hold on there!' he cried, and he set out after them at top speed. His hat blew off, and he stubbed his toe on a railroad tie, and when he did that his knee came up and smacked him on the chin. But he kept stretching out his long legs as fast as he could make them go, until he came up even with the leaders of the crowd.

'Hold on!' he yelled again, and waved his arms at them. They slowed up, and at last he managed to stop them. He held them there until the rest had caught up. When they were all together, he began a speech.

'Now, we want this to be a surprise for Big Dipper,' he spoke. 'Big Dipper has never had a good surprise in all his life. It will be good for him, and besides he will like it. So we will sneak up quietly and hide behind his house. Then I will go and talk to him, and I will pre-

tend like it's nothing much. After that I will give you the high sign when to come out.'

He turned and marched them up the hill, satisfied that they would keep quiet for Big Dipper's sake. It was a long hill, and by the time they reached the top the sun was getting over the treetops behind the water tank on Big Dipper's bean and puppy dog farm.

Come Along shushed all the whispers.

'There he is!'

And indeed, there Big Dipper was, sitting on the stoop of his house, not noticing. Come Along led his friends tiptoeing around to the back and told them to wait there for the high sign.

XIV

STARLIGHT on the beanstalks cast copper-colored flickers when the wind lifted the pods out of the blue dark to have one last look at them and then tucked them back quickly into the blue dark. Except for the satisfied whisper of the wind it was very quiet on the farm of Big Dipper.

Even so, if he hadn't been so busy thinking as he sat on the front stoop of his house, with his barrel stomach folded sadly over his knees, Big Dipper might have heard, sneaking around from the other side of the house, a quick '*Sh!*' now and then, and now and then a light tiptoeing, and once in a while a small ripple of a laugh that couldn't be kept inside.

But all Big Dipper could listen to was the lonesome rustle of the bean pods, and all he could look at was the lonesome flicker of the starshine, and all he could do that night was to sit on the stoop and scoop up a fistful

of loose dirt now and then and let it trickle slowly through his chubby, lonesome fingers, while his hoarse voice muttered: 'Nary a snap to my suspenders no more. Nary a finger to go a-skatin' over my bald head.'

He would heave a sigh then, so deep down that it sent mournful little ripples all the way up his stomach, and he would wipe his eyes with his big red bandana. ''Tain't what it useter be.'

He looked up one time to watch the wind spread a copper-colored sheet of flickers over the bean pods, when suddenly he saw Come Along shuffling toward him through the dark. He jumped up eagerly.

'Well?' he demanded, grabbing Come Along by the arm. 'Did ye find 'em? Have ye fetched 'em back with ye?'

'Not yet,' Come Along replied.

Big Dipper slowly sat down again, and for several minutes Come Along watched him staring at his beanstalks.

'I ain't had no luck neither,' Big Dipper said slowly.

'What!' gasped Come Along. 'You mean the puppy dogs? They didn't come up?'

Big Dipper shook his head.

'Not yet,' he said. 'Nary a paw, nary a ear, nary a tail.'

Come Along gave a long low whistle.

'Not even a bark?'

'Nary a squeal.'

Come Along whistled again. He sat beside the farmer, and for a few minutes they were both very still.

'Course,' Big Dipper went on, 'you can't never tell 'bout them things. The dogs may grow yet, like as not.'

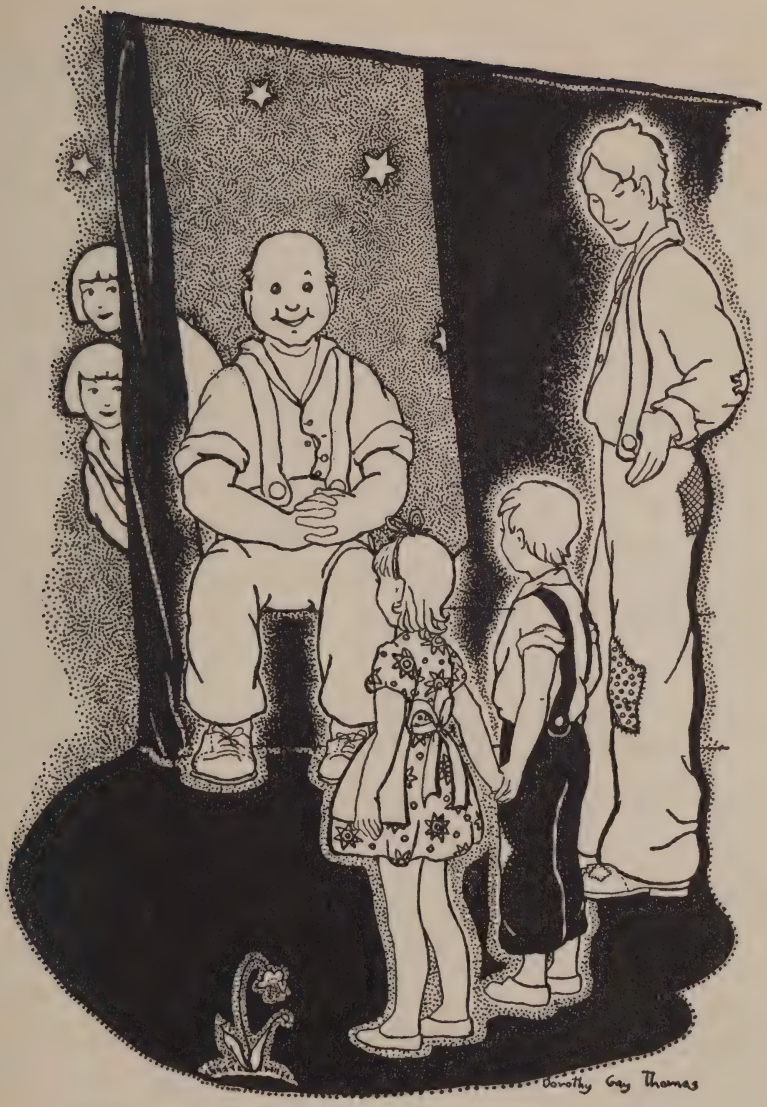
'Let's hope so,' replied Come Along. 'Because we got company now.'

Big Dipper's news about the puppy dogs came as such a surprise that Come Along almost forgot about his friends. But he remembered that, puppy dogs or no puppy dogs, there they were, and he wanted Big Dipper to meet them, so he got up, motioning the farmer to wait there for him while he went around to the other side of the house. There he gave Happy Day and Lucky Day the high sign.

Happy Day and Lucky Day eagerly followed Come Along to the front stoop.

When Big Dipper saw his new visitors, he sat up in surprise. All at once the lonesomeness slipped out of his chubby fingers and the lonesome look slipped out of his eyes.

'Well!' he exclaimed, sitting one of them down on each side of him, and looking them over while a smile spread across his face and made rows of new chins come back. 'Well! What d'ye think o' that!' And for a few



WHEN BIG DIPPER SAW HIS NEW VISITORS, HE SAT UP IN SURPRISE

minutes all he could say was 'Well!' coming from away down deep in some satisfied part of him.

'Somebody to keep you from getting lonesome, even if they aren't the ones,' Come Along explained.

'I kind o' like the way their eyes shine in this starlight,' Big Dipper told Come Along. He turned to Happy Day. 'Like to stay here a spell?'

The boy nodded, and Big Dipper asked his sister, almost timidly, 'An' you? Ain't much here, but ——'

'Oh, we know!' Lucky Day said, nodding and giving him a smile.

Big Dipper laughed out loud and shook hands with her. But Come Along had gone around in the meantime and given the high sign to Tell Me and How Come.

When Big Dipper saw *four* newcomers, he was so surprised he got all tangled up trying to talk four separate ways at once, so he ended simply by motioning the twins to join him, and they could tell how happy he was by the joyful wiggles of his stomach and the seven extra chins showing under his smile.

Then Come Along brought If You Please and Just For Fun. He brought Yours Truly and Ever Yours. He brought Sticky Fingers and Save Me A Lick. Big Dipper's eyes got wider and wider. And Come Along kept bringing more. Hundreds and hundreds of them. So many that the space in front of Big Dipper's house

was soon chock full and overflowing with company. And still they kept coming along! They came as one surprise after another for old Big Dipper — about a thousand surprises in all — and this was almost too much for him to hold all at once, big as he was, without actually bursting with the happiness.

By the time Big Dipper had met them all and shaken their hands, it was late, so Come Along gathered them around him and made a speech.

'And now,' he said, 'it's bedtime. That is my favorite time for going to sleep, especially when we got business to attend to to-morrow. So off you go.'

He hustled them, as many as would fit, into Big Dipper's house. He hustled a flock of them into his own house. He hustled others into the haylofts in the barns, and the rest he hustled into the haystacks outdoors. When he had finished, only he and Big Dipper were left. He called Big Dipper to him.

'I promised them the crop of puppy dogs would come up,' Come Along whispered. 'It gives me a nervous feeling now, not seeing any signs of them. It's the first promise I ever made in my life. It would be a shame not to keep it.'

'So 'twould,' agreed Big Dipper. 'I aim to do my best with that dog patch.'

Come Along looked him earnestly in the eye.

'Your very best?'

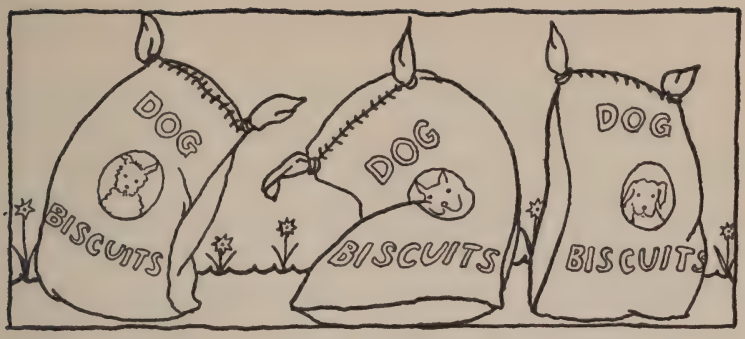
Big Dipper nodded.

'You know, a promise,' said Come Along, 'is a promise.'

Again Big Dipper nodded.

Then Come Along held out his hand.

'Shake on it!' he said, and solemnly he and Big Dipper shook on it. Then the two neighbors turned and marched each into his own house for the night.



XV

NEXT morning the sun was up bright and early, and so was Come Along. But Big Dipper's new friends were up ahead of both of them, and Come Along found his house empty. He looked out the window and across the fence at Big Dipper's place.

There he saw the busiest bean and puppy farm in the United States. He saw brown heads, yellow heads, and red heads bobbing about among the beanstalks. He listened to the pat-pat of running feet and the buzz of questions fluttering over the puppy patch.

'There is something in the air,' Come Along said as he sat in the open window, 'there is too much of a something that hasn't happened yet, floating in the air. Too much whispering and waiting. Too much searching and wondering. It gives me a jumpy feeling.'

He held up his hand, with his fingers spread apart, and he could almost feel the whispering and waiting that

stirred in the air. He could see it in the way the grass stood up and peered over. He could hear it in the holiday hum of the bees taking a day off. It was everywhere — waiting, listening, looking — everywhere and in the cracks between.

'And still,' Come Along went on, 'I wish we had brought along those two we passed up yesterday, while they were sitting on the fence and waving to us. I have had a feeling about them ever since, and it still bothers me.'

In the distance he saw Big Dipper waddling toward the gate, so he jumped into his clothes and went down to meet him.

A broad grin was rippling all over Big Dipper's face.

'Mornin',' he said.

'You sound good to me,' Come Along told him. 'You are the only thing around here that isn't anxious. Tell me about it.'

'Oh, I'm makin' out fair to middlin',' Big Dipper replied. 'Now it's somethin' like what it useter be hereabouts.'

'And how about the puppy dogs?'

'Ain't showed up yet,' Big Dipper replied, 'but we got hopes, the boys an' the girls an' me.' The hopes sounded loud in his big chesty voice and twinkled in his eyes and shone on two spots where the sunbeams

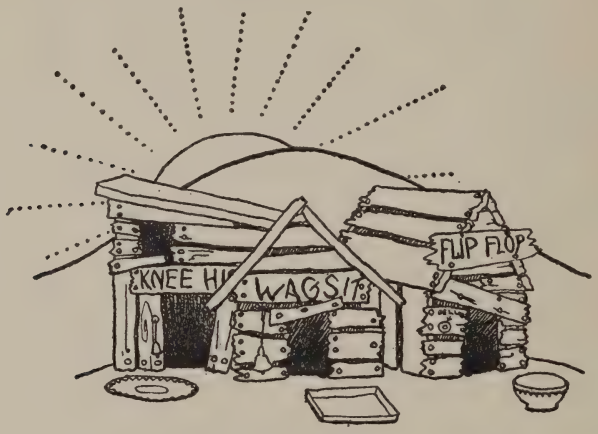
bounced off his fat round cheeks. 'I told 'em we got to give them dogs more time,' he went on. 'An' I put 'em to work on the dog patch. I'm keepin' 'em busy helpin' me, an' I figger what with all this help, why — there's hopes!' He wiped his forehead with his bandana. 'But they are keepin' me busy, too,' he added. 'It's a sight o' work, usin' all this help!'

'When you got hopes,' said Come Along, 'something usually happens.'

He hitched up his pants and put his hat on. He was still thinking about the boy and the girl who were left behind on the fence, and the thought bothered him so that he decided to go back and look for them. It seemed best to keep it a secret until he found them, so he said to Big Dipper, pretending careless, 'I'm going for a walk to do me good. Maybe by the time I get back something will happen.' And he started shuffling down the road, slow and easy.

The farmer leaned on his hoe and watched his neighbor round the turn in the road. Suddenly a hand slipped into Big Dipper's own, and he heard a voice calling his name. Another hand slipped in and took hold of two fat fingers, and another voice called. Then he felt more hands, tugging at his overalls. This way, that way, he was called and tugged. They asked for rakes, spades, shovels, hoes. They made him show them how to dig

ditches to carry water through the puppy patch. They explained to him how they were pulling out the weeds and putting up fences and dog houses.



There were so many things for Big Dipper to look at, so many questions to answer, that they kept swinging him about like a great windmill. They kept him hopping from one spot to another, with his bulging barrel stomach bouncing up and down while he ran. All that day, Big Dipper was the busiest bean and puppy dog farmer in the country.

XVI

As soon as he turned the corner, Come Along set out with a business-like step.

'It's a long walk,' he said, 'and I'm not sure I can find that fence again, and I'm not sure they will be sitting on it if I do find it, but those are my plans and here I go.

He tried to keep up his business-like step, but before long he felt something interfering. He slowed down, and then he stopped altogether.

'When I walk over the grass with my shoes on,' he explained to himself, 'the blades tickle my toes where they stick out the ends of my shoes. If I take my shoes off, the tickles stop and the grass only feels cool and good-hearted.' So he slipped out of his shoes, tied the strings together and slung them over his shoulder.

He was crossing a bright green luscious gleaming meadow with cool grass and good-hearted dandelions, when he felt something very much like a tickle on his heels.

'Now that shouldn't happen,' he declared. 'My shoes are off.'

Come Along tried not to pay any attention to it.

'I am happy to find it so breezy, such breezy weather this morning,' he said pleasantly, pretending not to notice the tickle. 'I am happy to ——' He stopped. There it goes again, that tickle!' This time he turned to investigate.

'So *that's* what it is! Ah, I *suspected* I had taken my shoes off.'

Looking up at him was a large clumsy brown puppy dog, with a few black spots on one side and a few grey spots on the other.

'He has black eyes,' thought Come Along. 'Hm! Black eyes, and they are the kind that would shine in

the night-time. Where have I heard of him before? And a stubby tail. Hm! Not much of a tail, but he wags it. Now *where* have I heard of him before?'

This was such a problem to Come Along that he felt

he ought to figure it out if he could, so he chose a small pine tree with long needles, and sat in the shade to have a good think.

'Let's take it easy, you and I,' he told the puppy. 'My advice is, when you have anything on the tip of your tongue, don't try too hard, you might swallow it.'

He began to chew a pine needle, and felt the bitterness draw up his mouth. He took a long squint with each eye at the puppy dog.

'Black eyes! Short stubby tail! And it wags. Wags — hm! — wags!' He helped himself to another pine needle. But finally he shook his head. 'No, it's on the tip of my tongue all right, but I don't catch it. So I guess that lets you out.'

He got up, started on, looked over his shoulder at the puppy sitting gravely under the pine tree, and said, 'Well, good-bye.'

Come Along remembered that he had business to attend to, and again he took up his business-like step. But he hadn't gone far when he felt the same tickle on his heels.

'Now *that* shouldn't have happened!' he exclaimed, looking down at his toes and making sure he had kept his shoes off. But it did happen, and it happened again, and when he turned about to look, there was the same puppy dog, pattering at his heels and looking up at him.

This time Come Along picked a quaking aspen tree to sit under and have another good think. He chewed the bitter aspen leaves and leaned back against the trunk. But for the second time, he shook his head.

'No,' he announced, 'no use, I don't catch it. Too bad, puppy dog.'

He got up, started on, and looked over his shoulder again, saying, 'Well, so long.'

But the tickles came back. No matter what he tried to do to make believe it was all over, Come Along could still feel the tickles.

'Well this time,' he said, 'I know what's going on back there. And when a puppy dog does the same thing three times and you don't catch it, it's a sign he knows more about it than you do. So come along, pups,' he added over his shoulder. 'I take it for granted.'

XVII

Come Along found many fences as he traveled on, but none with a boy and a girl on it.

'The only way I can remember which fence is the right one,' he told the puppy dog, 'is by the boy and the girl on it. And the only way I would know which boy and girl are the right ones is by the fence they were sitting on. And now I have looked around so much, I believe I have lost the direction.' He stopped and studied. 'There are lots of directions in this part of the country,' he went on, 'if I could only pick the right one. Besides, he added to the puppy dog, 'I can't tell now whether it's *me* that's leading *you*, or *you* that's following *me*. It gets that way, with dogs. Suppose you try picking one of these directions.' And Come Along let the dog go ahead.

When they had made a couple more turns, they met an old woman in the road. She was stooping over and talking in a lecturing kind of voice.

'I'm sorry you are lost and astray,' she was saying, 'but our house is full up, and it's just a waste of your

time following me.' She saw Come Along and explained she had happened across a puppy dog and was having trouble happening away from him. Come Along took a look at the dog.

'A very small dog, isn't it?' he said. 'With bangs on his forehead that come down in his eyes. And he's only about knee high, isn't he? Hm! Let me see. Where have I heard of him before?'

'Maybe it would come back to you,' suggested the old woman hopefully, 'if you took the dog along.'

'It's a strange thing!' murmured Come Along. 'On the tip of a person's tongue is about as close as anything can get to a person. And here I am, trying to catch something on the very tip of my tongue, and no luck!' He turned to the puppy. 'Well, you would be company for What's His Name here. So come along, What's His Name and Who Is It.' The old woman watched him as he turned on down the road with the two puppy dogs tickling his heels.

Not long after that he stopped again.

'Seems to be a lot of excitement in the rear,' he declared. 'Something extra besides two puppy dogs is going on back there.' He turned, and there were the two dogs, but also there was a whirl of dust. It slowed down as he watched, and when the dust cleared away, there stood another puppy dog.

'That's a pretty slick trick!' Come Along told the new one. 'Never saw a dog do so many flipflops in my life. You must be a trick dog. And you know — you remind me of something! You put three things on the tip of my tongue where there were only two before. Well, come along, maybe I'll think of it later on.' And he started off with the three dogs scrambling at his heels.

Come Along followed the road that his first puppy dog had picked, until he came to a house. There was excitement there. Loud talking, scolding. And there was also a little whimper, with great sadness in it. Come Along stopped.

A man was doing the scolding. He spoke very fast and waved his arms angrily and now and then he pointed to a sign tacked up against a tree in his yard. He ended up by striding into the house and slamming the door.

On the doorstep sat a tiny puppy dog, making the sad little whimper. He was the smallest one Come Along had seen so far. His tail was curled nervously between his legs. Come Along looked at the puppy and then at the sign. Big black angry letters frowned down:

NO DOGS ALLOWED

'Ah, I understand!' said Come Along, taking hold of one of the puppy's ears and also uncurling his nervous

tail. 'It's because you are against the rules here. It's like a second bounce, being against the rules. Well, I have no rules tacked on me. You may come along with me.'

As he went on, with the four puppy dogs trailing behind, Come Along bit his lip thoughtfully and said to himself:

'I admit there are four things on the tip of my tongue now, but I just don't seem able to put my finger on any of them.' He tried putting his finger on the tip of his tongue. 'No, I just don't seem able.'

XVIII

THAT night Come Along kept the moon busy. The leaves above him were holding very still, for they were posing for their pictures, and all down the road the moon was painting leaf pictures on the ground in silver and black. Come Along's shadow rubbed out the pictures and the moon kept busy putting them back.

Come Along looked behind and chuckled. He had not found the fence where he once saw the boy and girl who were passed up by the train, and he had even lost his own way, but during the afternoon he had met more dogs, and he had invited them to come along, and all had accepted his invitations.

'I had four,' he figured, 'and I picked up eleven more, making a grand total of fifteen. Fifteen is a *grand* total indeed.' And he counted over the fifteen pairs of eyes

shining, the fifteen tails wagging friendliness in the moonlight.

The road wound on, leading them through the deserted streets of a little town that had gone to sleep early in the evening.

'These are quiet, well-brought-up dogs,' Come Along was thinking happily, 'sensible, quiet ——'

But just then, as they reached the edge of town, a tremendous ear-splitting chorus of barks broke into the

stillness of the night behind Come Along, a chorus that sounded like all the dogs in the world and their brothers and their brothers' barks saved up since last Fourth of July. For Come Along's dogs had turned up their heads all at once and let loose, putting everything they had into it, and keeping it up in a way that showed how very much it meant to them.

Come Along's hair stood up on end. He saw the fifteen tails whipping back and forth joyously in time to the chorus. Then he heard another dog chorus, coming from somewhere alongside the road. It broke out even louder than his own dogs could manage, a strange and awful din.

'This can't go on,' Come Along declared. 'Nothing like this could go on for long.'

But it did go on. It kept up steady, a better job than sixty steam whistles could do in a celebration, until the dogs, running ahead, led Come Along to a wire fence. There was a gate with a large padlock to it. Above, Come Along traced the letters of a sign:

CITY DOG POUND

'Ah!' he said. 'That clears things up, about the first dog chorus and the second dog chorus.' His hair came down from the ends it had stood on. But the dogs, both his own and the ones inside the fence, went on filling the night air with their compositions.

'Now, this — this music is very beautiful for dogs, I'm sure,' Come Along told himself seriously, 'but the people of the town may feel different.' He leaned against the fence and tried to think. 'The dog-catcher of this town has locked those dogs inside the dog pound,' he went on. 'Dogs don't like to be locked up, and that

was hard luck for them. But to-night they have all of a sudden made friends with my own dogs over long distance, a way dogs have. Now, I figure it wouldn't be fair to my fifteen dogs to lock them in with those others, just because they have made friends. And still, it doesn't seem right to keep such good friends separate. And now — and now I find I am getting myself mixed up.'

He sat down under the gate, and while he tried to think straight he tossed up a large stone absent-mindedly and caught it. 'I have to do the fair thing,' he said, and tossed up the stone again. It hit something this time with a click. The next time there was another click, and Come Along noticed that the stone had struck the padlock on the gate and sprung it open. The wind swung the gate back.

Bursting into the loudest chorus of all, forty puppy dogs came rushing out and climbing over Come Along, squealing gratefully and pawing his ears. They were the friendliest puppies he had met, and he guessed it was because they had been the lonesomest.

'No matter how many puppy dogs you put together,' he said, 'they get lonesome when you lock them up. Well, well,' and he picked one off the back of his neck and lifted another out of his pocket, 'if you come along with us you won't get locked up.'

HE HAD LOST HIS WAY, BUT HE HAD COLLECTED FIFTY-FIVE PUPPY DOGS

When he started on again, he looked behind him and saw fifty-five pairs of eyes shining and fifty-five tails wagging friendliness in the moonlight. He chuckled. He had lost his way, but he had collected fifty-five puppy dogs to keep him company, and fifty-five, he figured, was a much grander total even than fifteen.

Only a few turns farther on the road, Come Along came across another town, sound asleep. When they reached the edge of it, his fifty-five dogs gave another wonderful performance. This time it was even better — or worse, depending on how you looked at it — for another dog chorus at the side of the road broke out in answer to them.

When Come Along found another gate, with a sign above it, CITY DOG POUND, he promptly picked up a stone.

'I'm getting the hang of it now,' he said, knocking the stone against the padlock. 'These dogs are good teachers.' Soon the lock clicked open, and Come Along swung back the gate. Sixty puppy dogs were waiting behind it, to be let out.

When he started on again, Come Along took all sixty with him.

'If I had a piece of paper,' he said, 'I would add up how many dogs I got. But when you have this many, the exact figures don't matter much.'

Each time he came to a town after that, he looked for the dog pound first thing, where the town dog-catcher had locked up the stray puppies. And at each dog pound he had to let out all the dogs.

The road behind him, as far as he could see, was splattered with eyes that shone in their great joy and tails that wagged in their great friendliness. Come Along chuckled and strolled carelessly on.

XIX

When the sun got his first peep over the hilltop near the farm of Big Dipper next morning, he beamed down upon what must surely have been the finest, most spick and span puppy dog patch on any bean farm in the United States.

The ditches were dug, the ground was neatly spaded, the weeds pulled out. The dog houses were built, dog names were painted above the doorways to the dog houses and dog doorbells were attached under the dog names.

All day long, the day before, Big Dipper had worked and his thousand helpers had helped. Then they had gone to bed, hoping that by morning some sign, surely, would be seen of the puppy dogs.

So, when the time came, Big Dipper gathered his thousand helpers together and led the way to the puppy

patch. The expecting, the searching and waiting that were floating through the air had become so thick the bean farmer thought he could almost see it quivering in the surprised sunbeams. But when they got to the puppy patch ——

No dogs!

Not a sign, not a trace, not a sprout.

Every one stood around the puppy patch and stared. The buzz and chatter suddenly died out. You could hear the water slowly trickle down the ditches. You could hear the beanstalks rustle in the morning breeze, as if they seemed to be saying they had known it all along.

Big Dipper looked mournfully at his helpers, from one to the next, and the next to the next.

'They'd ought to of come up,' he said, pointing to the dog patch. 'Reckon it's my fault.'

Happy Day and Lucky Day watched the wrinkles slip into the bean farmer's great forehead. They watched him shake his head and stand gazing hopelessly at his puppy patch and then at his helpers.

'Maybe,' they told him, 'it's too early in the season. Maybe by this afternoon ——'

'No,' said Big Dipper, 'I figger they should ought to of come up.'

But he happened to look at Tell Me and How Come,

the twins. And he happened to see that the freckles on the tips of their noses were still bright and hopeful. He looked at Yours Truly and Ever Yours. There were still dreams in their eyes. Nobody else, he noticed, was quite as downhearted as he was himself.

'Well,' he announced, 'we'll wait until this afternoon. My neighbor over yonder,' and he pointed to Come Along's house, 'he says long as a body has hopes, like as not something will happen.'

They sat and waited quietly.

Noontime came. But nothing happened except short shadows and the buzz of the bees, who had decided to call off the holiday and make it business as usual.

Afternoon came. Still nothing happened except longer shadows and the regular afternoon happenings in that part of the country, like the practicing of the crickets on their buzzers and the fidgeting of the sunflowers along the railroad tracks.

Big Dipper wiped his forehead now and then, and fanned himself with his hat. It was so quiet, he could hear quite plainly every smallest thought he happened to have. And he was having so many thoughts as he sat there with his helpers all around him that sometimes he was afraid they might hear too. That made him look about nervously sometimes, because this was what he was thinking most:

'By to-night, if them puppies ain't showed up none, my helpers will go on along. Then it won't be like it useter be hereabouts no more. By to-night — if them dogs still ain't showed up.'

XX

Word gets around quickly among dogs. During the night, Come Along had marched through sixteen towns, and by morning all the stray pups in four States knew about it. They knew he had opened the dog pounds in all sixteen towns and let the dogs out. They knew the dogs were still following him that day, nearly a thousand of them, in a great parade, and as the parade went on through the morning, all other dogs who were within sniffing distance of it made a dash to join in.

Come Along met every kind of dog he could think of and a good many he couldn't think of and some he couldn't have dreamed of. Big clumsy uncertain puppies, little solid satisfied puppies, fat ones, skinny ones, wide awake and dreamy ones, brand new ones, slightly used ones, medium and uneven ones.

Brown dogs, black dogs, yellow and tan, stylish pups, hobo pups, they came in all colors, sizes, shapes, designs,

and models, and some there were who seemed to have no special color, no particular shape or design. There were very pompous proud pups and there were friendly careless pups. There were dogs from the best dog families and other dogs. There were slick elegant pups and pups that looked as if they had been thrown together in a hurry.

Come Along saw dogs with loose skins, dogs who edged along with the front end pointing one way and the back end pointing a different way, dogs who smiled with their tongues out, and dogs who kept their ideas to themselves. There were some with velvety ears and some with noble tails that stood up from the start and flourished with a grand whirl at the finish.

There were so many kinds that Come Along gave up trying to keep track of them. And at the end of the line was one puppy, the smallest of all, with the biggest look of all in his eyes and the most loving anxious movement to his tail.

When Come Along came to the next crossing, he stopped and puzzled over the roads.

'Yesterday,' he said, 'I found I lost the way to the fence I was looking for, and to-day I find I lose the way to get home. So I have lost all the ways I had, and here I am. But,' he added cheerfully, 'I have lots of company, and when there's company I feel more at home.'

With that he picked one of the roads carelessly and went on, whistling a tune as the great parade ambled behind him, a satisfied doggy tune that made itself up by itself.

But something else was happening that day, something that Come Along knew nothing about. It was happening because word gets around quickly among dog-catchers, and this is how it was:

When the dog-catcher in the first town Come Along had visited woke up that morning, he went to the dog pound as usual. Seeing the padlock off the gate and the gate wide open, he hurried in. There he stopped in his tracks. He rubbed his eyes. He pinched himself.

'What!' he cried. 'No dogs?' He grabbed his hat and started running, shouting out, 'Help! Thieves! Kidnappers! No dogs!' He ran all the way to the second town Come Along had passed the night before. He woke up the dog-catcher there, and together they rushed to the dog pound. The second dog-catcher's eyes widened. He shook himself. He gasped.

'What! No dogs?'

And he snatched his net and started running. The two dog-catchers went to the third town, and there it was the same story. No dogs. Puffing on as fast as they could go, the three dog-catchers ran and shouted all the way to the fourth town, and the four dashed on to the

fifth, and it happened this way all through to the sixteenth town Come Along had visited.

Gathered in the last empty dog pound, the sixteen dog-catchers put their heads together and whispered. They took their nets and stooped low over the ground. They snooped about until they found dog tracks. They followed the tracks to the road. Then they swung their nets over their shoulders and set out after the dogs at a lively dog-catcher's trot.

Now, a dog can smell a dog-catcher at a fairly good distance, especially the kind of dogs Come Along had collected. But it happened that the wind that morning was blowing the wrong way, and therefore the puppies trotted on without suspecting.

All morning the dog-catchers kept up their steady gait. By noon the distance between them and the easy-going dogs was cut in half. Through the afternoon it became smaller and smaller, and late in the day the dog-catchers swung up, only three turns in the road behind Come Along's parade. They cut it down to two turns. They chased on until there was only one turn.

But at that time the wind switched about. Suddenly a thousand noses turned up in the air. A thousand sniffers sniffed. A thousand dogs began to bark. Come Along turned and saw the dog-catchers speeding after him.

'Come along!' he cried to his dogs, and away he leaped at a furious pace. But the puppies were already ahead of him. They needed no telling! They fled up a hill. At the top Come Along found railroad tracks, and down the tracks a little he spied a hand car. He scurried along the tracks and jumped on the car, the dog-catchers close on his heels.

Come Along started pumping the hand car when he looked back and noticed the little puppy who had trailed along at the end of the parade, the smallest one of all, with the biggest look in his eyes. The pup was tired out. With a despairing gesture of his tail, he stopped and watched the hand car rolling away.

Come Along jumped off. He ran back and scooped up the puppy in one hand, without stopping. A dog-catcher made a grab for him, but only got a piece of his shirt. He scurried back to the hand car, jumped on, and began to pump the handle so fast his long lank body looked like a great pair of scissors folding and unfolding, snipping furiously at the air.

The dog-catchers chased after the hand car and the hand car rolled along behind the dogs. Come Along managed to keep out of reach of the straining dog-catchers, but most of the puppies he had taken with him were quite young ones, and he noticed that the legs of some were getting wobbly, and their tongues hung low.

So he whistled to those whose tongues hung the lowest, and they climbed on the hand car and sat there until they could catch their wind. Then they would jump off and run ahead, while others would take their turns getting a rest in the hand car.

They kept this up through the rest of the day and into the twilight, the dog-catchers chasing, the dogs fleeing and taking their turns on and off the hand car, and Come Along pumping away as fast as he could.

Through the dusk Come Along could make out the blurry, hurrying figures of the dog-catchers, swinging their nets in time to their steady jogging pace. He could hear the pounding of their feet on the railroad ties, and the anxious puffing of their breath.

The farther they ran, Come Along noticed, the louder grew the puffing of the dog-catchers, and he suspected *their* tongues also were beginning to hang low, though by that time it was too dusky to see.

'And besides,' Come Along thought, with a chuckle, 'they have no hand car!' And he pumped on for all he was worth, looking back from time to time to check up on the dog-catchers.

At last he saw one of the dog-catchers begin to slow up. He was the first catcher, the one who had run all the way from the first town, away back. He had come the farthest, and he got tired the soonest. A little way

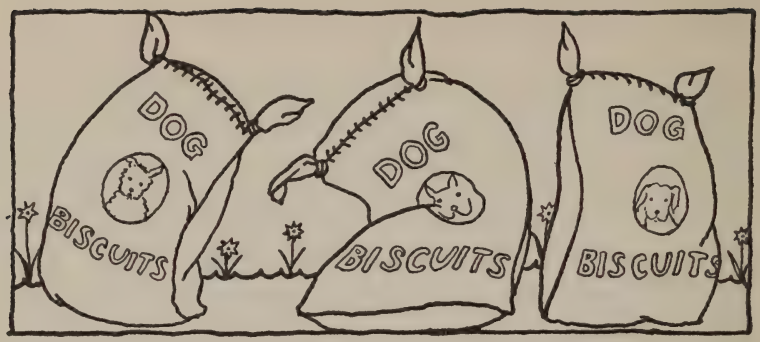
more, and he had to drop out. The others kept on, but a little way farther still, the same thing happened to the second dog-catcher. He slowed up and dropped out. Then the third, fourth, fifth — one by one, all of them gave up except the sixteenth dog-catcher.

He did his best, the last dog-catcher, but Come Along's hand car rolled merrily on, just out of his reach. Gasping for breath, the weary dog-catcher made a few swings of his net, hoping to pick off one of the dogs. But Come Along pumped harder than ever and saved the day.

At last the lone dog-catcher began to puff as the others had done. He too slowed up, and stopped, flopping down on a rail, where he sat and ruefully watched Come Along, hand car, dogs, and all disappear in the deepening twilight.

'That's that!' said Come Along, when he had rolled out of sight of the last dog-catcher. He paused to breathe a sigh, but as he looked about him, he caught his breath.

'Ha!' he exclaimed. 'I had lost my way, but now I remember this railroad. The same one that leads to Big Dipper's farm! Those dog-catchers have done me a favor. They have put me on the right track.' And he began to pump the hand car even faster than before, until the wheels set up a pleasant hum and the night wind tickled his ears with a home-like swish.



XXI

Shadows of Big Dipper and his helpers stretched out lonesomely across the empty puppy patch while the sun gathered up a bouquet of small yellow clouds to take away with him for the evening.

Big Dipper watched the blue deepen in the east. The deeper blue spread over the sky like thin filmy curtains lifted out of the east and laid one on top of the other. He saw that the first star had mysteriously come out.

'To-night,' went Big Dipper's thoughts to the star, 'you'll be lookin' down on a mighty lonesome bean farm here, an' me a-settin' in the middle of it. No helpers, no dogs, no nothin' — jes' me.'

'To-night,' the helpers of Big Dipper were thinking when they saw the star, 'you will look down on us going along the road again, looking for our puppy dogs that didn't come up in poor old Big Dipper's farm, and feel-

ing more lonely for puppy dogs than we ever were before.'

They waited on, some still hopefully keeping an eye on the puppy patch, until a whole skyful of stars was shining.

'Well,' Big Dipper said out loud, 'them dogs ain't even broke the ground yet, an' it's a shore thing they was due afore now. So I ain't aimin' to keep ye here, them as wants to go on a-lookin' som'res else.'

He was just about to turn back and get their hats and coats for them when a strange thing happened in the puppy patch. First there was a patter of small feet. Then a bark. And the next thing the helpers of Big Dipper heard was two glad yells.

'Wagsit! It's our dog Wagsit!'

In the middle of the puppy patch Happy Day and his sister Lucky Day were dancing around a brown puppy dog with a stubby tail that was wagging so furiously it looked as it it might fly off, short as it was.

Before the others even had time to ask questions, more pattering feet were heard coming toward the puppy patch, and two more joyful yells.

'Knee High!'

Tell Me and her brother How Come were jumping up and down for joy, and between them they had a small dog with bangs on his forehead.

Fast on the tracks of Knee High came more pattering feet, and two more glad yells broke out. This time it was Yours Truly and Ever Yours, and they had jumped up when they spotted Flipflop, their trick pup.

'There's Old-Timer!' Just For Fun called to his sister If You Please. And from then on, one after the other the puppy dogs came trotting into the field, Second Bounce, Out For The Afternoon, and hundreds more.

Big Dipper had plopped down in amazement when he saw the dogs come filing in, and he sat and watched, open-mouthed. Then he began to laugh, and he laughed until his great stomach hurt.

'I ain't got no idee whar them dogs is comin' from,' he gasped, 'but I hope they keep a-comin'!'

They did keep coming, until everybody had got the dog he was looking for, and nobody was left out. But there was one dog to spare, a little puppy, the smallest one of all, that Come Along had rescued that afternoon with a scoop of his hand, and he trotted in at the heels of Come Along himself.

Big Dipper jumped up when he saw his neighbor and began to stammer out what had happened, getting so mixed up in his excitement that he had to stop now and then to smooth out his thoughts.

But Come Along was puzzled, when he saw his one

FAST ON THE TRACKS OF KNEE HIGH CAME MORE PATTERING FEET

small puppy to spare, and he rubbed his chin thoughtfully, not hearing much of Big Dipper's talk.

'There is one thing still on the tip of my tongue,' Come Along was saying. 'Still one thing.' And he pointed to the little dog with the big look in his eyes and the loving anxious movement to his tail.

XXII

It was a long time before things quieted down that night on the bean farm of Daniel Digby Dubbeldimple Dipper.

When he had finally hustled all the dogs and their owners off to sleep, Come Along sat on the stoop of Big Dipper's house and talked in drowsy whispers with the farmer. He whispered about how handy a hand car can be, and what a pleasure and a helpful feeling it would be to roll back sixteen miles along a railroad track and inspect sixteen tired dog-catchers, sitting each one a mile apart, dog-tired and thinking over a lesson they had learned about puppy dogs that belonged to people.

Big Dipper listened, and whispered back about what a satisfying thing it is to keep a promise, one way or another, and about how much better he thought he understood puppy dogs and puppy dog owners now.

The lonesome little pup at Come Along's feet, the one left over, who had no owner to sleep with that night,

listened too, as he lay curled up in a fluffy ball. But suddenly, while they were talking, he uncurled himself, put his nose in the air, sniffed as though it smelled important, and trotted away.

'Something's in the wind,' said Come Along. 'He wouldn't do that unless something was in the wind. It may be worth following up.'

He went after the puppy, around the house and through the gate, along the other side of the fence, until they came to Come Along's old rain barrel. There the dog stopped and took special pains with his sniffer. Suddenly he darted to one end of the barrel and set up a happy squeal.

'I don't know your language,' Come Along told him, 'but your gestures make it clear.' He picked up the barrel and shook it. Out tumbled heads, hands, heels, all mixed up. Come Along untangled them and stood them up — a boy and a girl. He looked them over, turning their faces so the moon would help out.

'I have a suspicion,' he murmured, 'that you two are familiar faces.' He looked at them once, twice, three times. 'Ah, now I get it!' he cried. 'The very two I have been looking for!' And he remembered them as they looked sitting on the fence when the train passed them up.

The boy and the girl blinked in the bright moonlight and rubbed the sleep out. Then they saw the puppy dog at Come Along's feet, and with two of the gladdest yells of all, they caught him up in their arms and began to play with him like old friends.

It was easy to see that the dog belonged to them for keeps. But Come Along had another question, about whom *they* belonged to, itching on the tip of his tongue.

'Do you two belong here?' he asked. 'Or are you playing hooky from somewhere else?'

Holding to one of the puppy dog's ears, the boy looked up and smiled at Come Along in a willing way. He pointed to Big Dipper's house.

'We belong over there,' he said. 'I am Little Dipper.'

The girl, looking up from the puppy's face to Come Along, smiled in a helpful way and said: 'My name is Little Bitty Dipper. And this is our dog,' she added, 'and he belongs over there too.'

She also pointed to Big Dipper's house.

'Our dog's name is Teaspoon,' explained Little Dipper, proudly.

Come Along grabbed them quickly as if he were afraid they might run away again.

'At last!' he declared. 'Big Dipper's boy and girl!'

They nodded, but Little Dipper took Come Along's hand and pulled him down where he could whisper in his ear.

'Do you think,' he asked, pointing to the farmer's house, 'do you suppose he would mind — very much — if we bring our dog in with us?'

'We are kind of homesick,' Little Bitty Dipper whispered in Come Along's other ear. 'Do you think he would let us come back —' and she added very quickly, 'and bring our dog with us?'

'Well, now,' drawled Come Along, pretending not to have a secret warm tickle inside under his ribs, 'I'm not sure, but if I were you I believe I'd take a chance.'

And he shook hands with them and hustled them off through the gate to Big Dipper's house. Then he stretched himself out in his favorite position, with his

legs swung up over the old rain barrel, let the moonbeams come down and bounce off his forehead, dug his thumbs under his suspender gadgets, and smiled.

While Come Along sat there peacefully, he heard something gurgle through the dark from the direction of Big Dipper's house. A joyful, bubbling ripple, a deep, husky, surprised chuckle. Then he heard a crack like the snap of somebody's suspenders, and a great chesty roll of laughter.

Come Along's eyelids crept closer and closer together, until they touched. But even when he had fallen sound asleep that night, with the moonbeams bouncing all about him, he didn't bother to change the smile wrinkles in his nose and his forehead.

THE END

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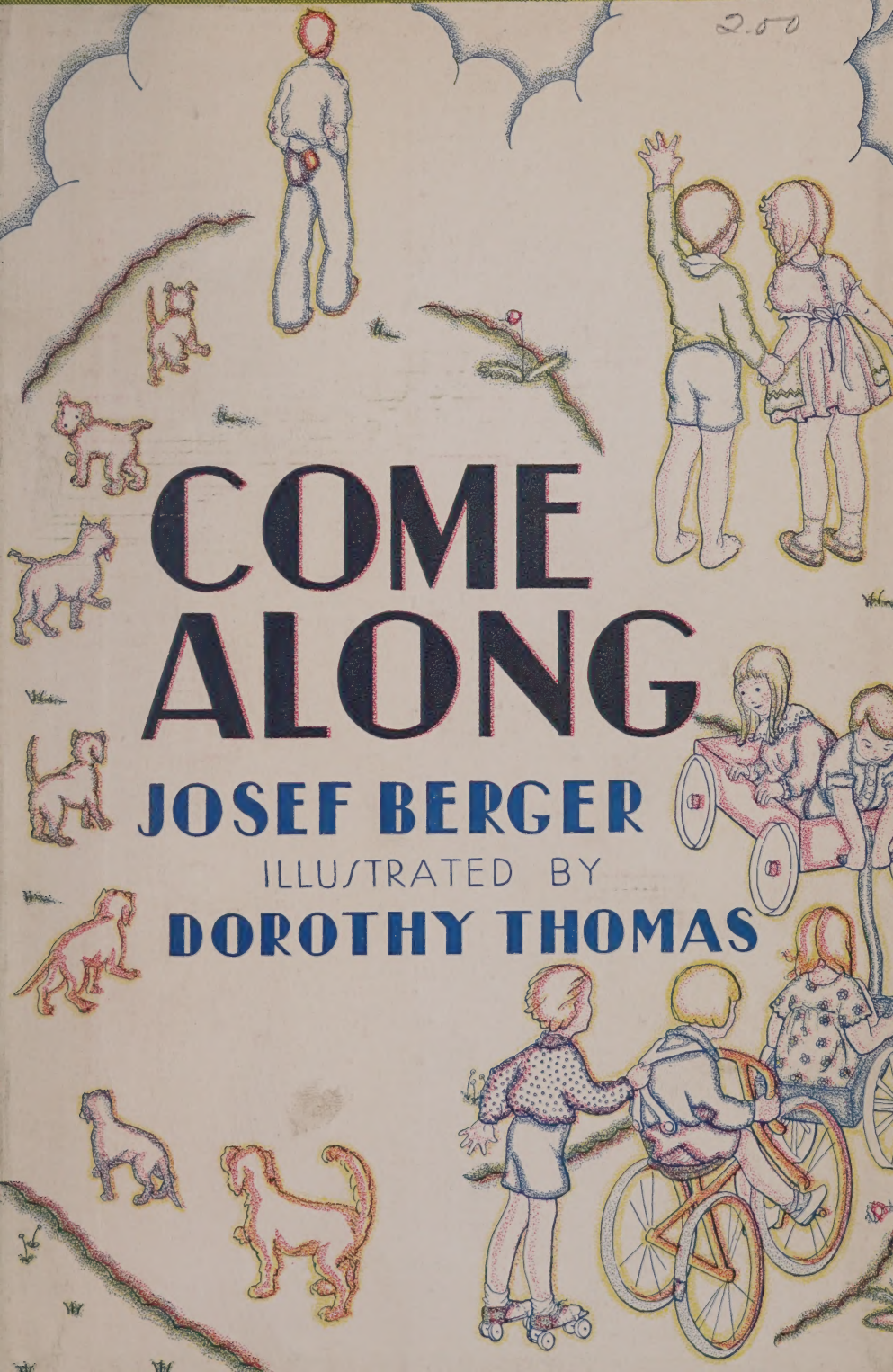
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COME ALONG
JOSEF BERGER
ILLUSTRATED BY
DOROTHY THOMAS

SUSIE SUGARBEET

By Margaret Ashmun

Of course that wasn't her real name. It was Susie Siegefried, but her father took care of the fields of sugar beets on a big farm, and so the children at school teasingly called her Susie Sugarbeet. When Susie came from the city to live in the Little House on the farm, she thought that it was the nicest house she had ever seen; and when she met the two girls from the Big House, she thought that they were the nicest girls in the world. This story for girls from eight to ten is written in an extremely simple and lucid style. It has the homeliness and joy in small things which is the essential spirit of the child's book. There are six illustrations, end papers, and a jacket in color by Maginel Wright Barney.

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